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"DROP HER, YOU VILLAIN! OR I WILL DROP YOU!"

THE Detective on Wheels; OR, THE Sensation at Washington Heights.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,
AUTHOR OF "BROADWAY BILLY" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE BOULEVARD SCORCHER.

"LET him try it just once more, and I'll give him all the scorch he wants if I have to."

whirl my tires off!" So cried Officer Schuessler, of the New York Bicycle Police Corps, as he joined a group of his fellow wheelmen after a vain spin to catch a scorcher.

"Got away from you, did he?"

"Yes; but he'll not do it again!"

"The wonder is that he could do it this time."

"Chance favored him and hindered me, that's why."

"You'll have to put on steam, Schuessler, if you ever catch him," observed Charlie Thomsen, another active member of the active corps.

"You ought to tackle him, Charlie," remarked Frank Reilly, also a member. "You ran down the so-called King of Scorchers, you know, and you ought to be able to scoop this chap."

"I had, eh?" disputed Thomsen. "That said King could not touch one side of this man in a race. Besides, if Schuessler can't do it I am not in it, that's sure. He belongs to the 2:15 class, you know, while I am hardly out of the 2:30 at present."

"It looks as if you will have your hands full, Schuessler," averred Reilly.

"I don't care if he is chain lightning!" that chagrined officer declared. "I'll have him, if I have to chase him all the way to Harlem. We can't afford to let anything on wheels outrun the members of this corps; eh, boys?"

"That's what's the matter!" agreed Officer Neggesmith, still another of the light brigade—a man who stands well up in matters of speed and daring captures. "When we begin to be outdone then it will be time for us to put our bikes on the pins and retire."

"What I say," growled Schuessler.

The cause of all this talk was a new wheelman who had recently made his appearance on the Boulevard.

On two or three occasions he had led the crack riders of the police corps a spurt, but thus far, by speed or chance—perhaps both combined, had eluded arrest for scorching. He it was who had just escaped from Schuessler, one of the "flyers" of the corps.

"Well, lie low for him," Schuessler, suggested Thomsen, "and if you sight him again don't let him get the start of you. Nip his little game right in the bud."

"What I want is to nip him by the neck."

"Yes, that will be better still."

They parted company, each to go his round of the beautiful Park and the Boulevards.

The bicycle corps is an institution that has "come to stay," evidently. It is the flying squadron—the light brigade of the gallant Metropolitan police. It has rendered magnificent service to the too-exacting public, and the corps' coats and leggings have come to be a familiar sight on all the thoroughfares where wheelmen abound.

Every man of them being a trained athlete and experienced wheelman, few of them can be outdone on a run, long or short. Not one but can do his mile in 2:30, and some of them in 2:15, or even less. At all busy points at least one of these officers is always found, alert, vigilant, keen-eyed as eagles.

The man we have mentioned as giving them trouble and eluding arrest was unknown to any who had seen him.

He was of athletic build, clad in a close-fitting cycle suit of plain gray, and wore a beard.

One thing about him annoyed those of the police who had given him pursuit:

He had a way of turning a corner and disappearing as utterly as if the ground had opened and taken him in!

In that manner he had just eluded Schuessler. He had darted through a bevy of young lady cyclists, where there seemed scant room for even a cat to dodge, and where Schuessler had been obliged to reduce his speed to avoid collision.

The scorcher had so startled the girls that they were uncertain in their balance for the moment, and for Schuessler to have followed his man at full speed would have been highly dangerous. He stopped, the man turned a corner, and when the ladies had passed and Schuessler pedalled to the corner, his man had vanished.

So it had been with others in pursuit, as said; and Schuessler, being one of the crack flyers, felt it keenly.

But his resolve was taken; he meant "business" now!

Later in the day he was wheeling leisurely along the Western Boulevard when he noticed a wheelman who had just passed him.

Unless the officer was greatly mistaken it was the mysterious scorcher again, and he fell in behind and kept pace with him, only waiting for him to essay another flight of speed.

Faster, and a little faster, the man went, until he had reached and passed the speed limit; then Schuessler, resolving to take him in, put on pressure to even up with him, when, to the officer's surprise, he did not gain an inch.

The mysterious wheelman kept just so far ahead, and in a few moments more both were flitting along the smooth Boulevard like swallows.

But Schuessler was sure of his man. He was too close upon the scorcher for him to think of escaping, and could stop him any moment he chose—the "cop" champion decided.

That, however, was not his purpose; he meant to run the man down and take some of the conceit out of him by showing him that no scorcher could stand any chance against the flying corps.

On they went, and began to attract attention.

The officer was letting out a little more speed, then a little more, but the other was just so far ahead, and there he remained!

Schuessler could not cut down the distance, no matter how he might try, so it began to look to all observers.

People gave them a clear road, and those on the sidewalks stopped to watch the flight of the matchless flyers. All expected the blue coat to overhaul the pursued, but they did not see it right away. Both men were going like the wind.

Suddenly another officer on a wheel appeared ahead, ready to block the road.

Schuessler motioned him out of the way.

He had started the game, and meant to run the man down or hand in his badge!

The other drew back, and pursued and pursuer darted past him like the flyers they were, and were in the distance in a few moments. The Boulevard had never seen the like.

Block after block was passed, and the further they went the clearer the road they had before them for the race.

Presently the scorcher glanced over his shoulder.

"Now, then, come on and take me!" he shouted. "A fair trial, now, old man, and the victor takes the palm!"

"And you'll take a night in the cooler!" shouted the officer, in response.

"Bet you a straight Havana I don't!"

"I'll show you!"

"Oh, will you?" and then, with wondrous reserve power the man in the lead shot ahead like an arrow from the bow!

For a few moments the officer fell behind; then he, too, put in more work, and shot away at his very highest speed. And thus they continued the flight, to the delight of all observers.

At last the officer, seeing that he was being outdone, and full of chagrin, shouted:

"Stop! Stop! or I fire!"

"Don't shoot!" was the prompt response. "I'll stop!"

The scorcher slackened speed instantly, and Schuessler was up with him the next moment.

"You are my prisoner, sir," he said. "What do you mean by such speeding as you have been doing, when you ought to know the law?"

"Don't be rough on a fellow, old man," urged the prisoner, laughing. "I only wanted to try my new machine, and I knew you wouldn't give me half a fair heat unless you meant business—"

"Sam Buckley, the detective!"

"At your service, old friend; but now, Scorcher Sam, the detective on wheels." And the scorcher made the officer a bow, cap in one hand and in the other the beard he had removed from his face, which had served him the purpose of a complete disguise!

CHAPTER II.

SCORCHER SAM'S TANDEM SCOOP.

Officer Schuessler looked at his fellow officer in half anger.

"I have a notion to run you in for it, anyhow, just for sweet revenge," he declared.

"Wouldn't blame you if you did, that's the fact," was the Scorcher Detective's laughing response. "However, let me beg off this time."

"What kind of a wheel have you got there, anyhow?"

"A special; and that's what did the business for you. I can't outrun you on a machine of equal size; you know that well enough. You are Schuessler, the invincible."

"It is a bute, and no mistake. It looks innocent enough; don't look as if it could go so lightning swift. What are its specifications, anyhow?"

"Why, you see it has a thirty-one inch rear wheel, is geared up to eighty-four in the sprockets besides, and has an extra inch to the length of its cranks."

"Whew! No wonder I failed to overhaul you, with my seventy-eight. No one but a crank would ride such a thing as that. I'll bet you will tire of it and come back to something sensible before you have used it three months, see if you don't."

The detective laughed again.

"That's what I am—a crank!" he admitted, "so the wheel ought to suit me first rate. It has had a fair test, now, Schuessler, against you. How in the world you ever pushed me the way you did, is more than I can see. There is not a rider in New York can get away from you if you want him, for you are the crack of the squad, as everybody knows. I'll bet we did that last mile in two-ten."

"I think I was riding faster than I ever rode before, that I'll admit. But, what do you expect to do on a wheel as

a detective? You ought to be one of our corps."

"Just what I am, old fellow, but in citizen's dress, and privileged to go anywhere and everywhere. Commissioners have given me a great big card, and it is as blank as a wall. They expect me to do duty where your blue coat would be in the way; see?"

"Yes, I see. But, people will soon get on to you—"

"Will they? I have as many disguises as I have got fingers and toes, and a few more besides. I'll be a stranger to all you fellows; more than half the time you'll not know me."

"In that case, we'll be after you all the time, too, if you do any scorching; be sure of that. But, then, some signal will be arranged, of course, so we'll know you."

"Yes; all that will be attended to."

"Well, are you coming back with me? Don't have it said that you got away from me, Sam!"

"I'll ride back with you, of course, meek as a lamb. You caught me, fair and square, for you could have ordered me to stop long before you did, and I would have been obliged to stop."

They remounted and rode slowly back in the direction of the Circle at Fifty-ninth street, where two or three or more of the squad on wheels are usually to be found, talking together as they rode along, Scorcher Sam telling of his special assignment and instructions.

Of late, the police commissioners had been receiving complaints from the people of the northern part of the city, both sides of the Harlem River, and even over in Westchester, against persons who were committing depredations and making use of the bicycle as a means of escape; and at last they had decided to send out a few detectives in citizen's dress to take a hand in the matter.

Sam Buckley was one of the keenest detectives the city could boast, and as he was a wheel enthusiast, he was one of those chosen for this service. It was a call not every one could fill. In the first place, the candidate had to have an A1 reputation as a detective; coupled with that he had to be an expert wheelman. Many who were the former, were not the latter, and vice versa; but in Sam Buckley both qualifications were well blended.

By the time they reached the Circle, all those who had witnessed the starting of the scorch had given place to others who knew nothing about the incident, save the police officers, so their return attracted no notice.

"What!" cried Officer Neggesmith, who happened to be there at the moment; "lost him again, Schuessler?"

"Does this look like it?" Schuessler demanded, indicating his companion.

"Why, that's Sam Buckley! We all know him!"

"And he's the chap. He is Scorcher Sam, from this time on; that, is the name he gives himself, and it's a good one, on my word."

"But, you caught him?"

"Caught nothing!"

"Yes, he did, too, fair enough!" averred the detective. "Nothing can get away from Schuessler when he goes after it, in dead earnest."

"Unless he is an expert to begin with, like Sam here, and happens to be mounted upon such a thing as this," calling attention to Sam's wheel. "It would take an Empire Express to overhaul him."

"Well, we needn't feel bad about it, knowing that Sam is one of us, any-

how; there is considerable consolation in that."

At that moment a park policeman came up.

"See here, I have got a tip for you fellows," he announced.

"What is it, Moran?" from Sam.

"A couple of chaps down there with a tandem are coming out for a scorch as soon as they think the way is clear."

"You heard them say so?"

"Heard the whole thing. They have got a new machine, and want to try its speed."

"And they mean to run the risk of arrest to do it, eh? Well, now, they may get mightily fooled."

"They have counted on your not being able to catch them, even if they are seen. They look like a pair of wealthy sports, who wouldn't care for a fine, anyhow."

"All right, let them come!"

"And right there they do come, sure enough!"

The policeman indicated a tandem then coming slowly up the parkway to the Circle.

"There is a chance for you, Scorcher Sam," intimated Schuessler, with some excitement. "Put on your badge and follow them up, for the fun of it, and I'll follow you."

"All right, old fellow; that's what I'm out for, to-day."

So saying, Sam put on his badge, and without seeming to notice the riders of the tandem, fell in behind them.

They were young men, evidently a brace of "chappies" belonging to the "first families." Their mount was a sparkler and presumably a speeder as well, for their kind usually have the best that money can buy.

For some distance they ran on at a moderate speed, until at last no member of the blue-coat brigade was to be seen anywhere ahead; then they increased their speed and in a few minutes were going at double the regulation gait, with Scorcher Sam close behind.

Schuessler was not far in the rear of Sam, and was keeping pace.

Presently Sam called out:

"Here, now, enough of that! You fellows stop!"

The second chap on the tandem turned his head and shouted defiantly:

"Can't stop; won't have time! If you want us, come on and get us—if you think you can do it."

Then began a race in earnest, one man against two, and those two mounted upon one of the finest racing tandems yet turned out of a factory.

Away they went, with the speed of a huge bird on the wing, sending back a laugh at him who had challenged them, feeling secure against being overtaken.

But, they did not know the wheel that was hot on their trail.

Scorcher Sam bent himself to his task, and began to creep up and lessen the distance that separated him from the team. The hind man looked again, presently, and seeing him gaining, spoke to his companion, and they did their best.

But, all to no purpose. Before two blocks more had been traversed, Sam was abreast with them, and commanded them to slacken their speed or he would crowd them to the curb and bring them to grief.

Needless to say they obeyed the order. He placed them under arrest, and in a moment more Schuessler was on hand. Sam turned them over to him, with a reminder that the police bicycle brigade was still in the field.

CHAPTER III.

THE VONBRONX MYSTERY.

Scorcher Sam had accomplished one thing.

He had given his new mount several severe tests within a day or two, and had found it not wanting.

When Schuessler had taken charge of the prisoners, the detective took leave of him and proceeded leisurely up the Boulevard, intending to take a look over certain ground.

What he had said to Officer Schuessler was rather general. He had particular instructions besides; in fact, a case in hand, and one that had been giving the superintendent of police something to think about for days.

He had taken off his badge, after stopping, and now could not be told from a citizen.

But, the case.

Out near Fort Washington, between the Western Boulevard and the Fort Washington Ridge Road, was found, early one morning, a young lady lying unconscious.

Her name was VonBronx—Claudia VonBronx, daughter of a very wealthy gentleman who owned a princely residence in that neighborhood. She was carried home, as soon as she recovered and could tell who she was, and the matter was hushed up at once, so far as the public was concerned.

Dexter VonBronx, however, was not the man to allow anything of that kind to pass unnoticed, when it came so close home to him, and he went in person to the chief of police to see what could be done toward solving the mystery. To think that one of his daughters—he had two—should be found in such a place and condition; why, it was horrible! So, in truth, it was, and would have been in any case.

"But," asked the chief, "what does your daughter say about it, Mr. VonBronx?"

"That is the deuce of it, sir, that is the deuce of it!" the millionaire cried. "That is the reason I am here, sir. It is because she won't tell me, that I am determined to know."

"Ah! I see."

"And I want you to find out for me."

"Well, if it is something she will not tell, perhaps it is something you are just as well off for not knowing."

"That is for me to judge, when I learn all about it; and I am determined to know, one way or another. Do you hear me? I am determined that the mystery of that night shall be cleared!"

"Well, let us go over the ground," said the chief. "What do you know about it now, sir?"

"Nothing, absolutely nothing."

"What time did your daughter leave the house?"

"I do not know."

"Does any one of the household know?"

"Not one of them, sir; I have asked them all."

"Well, what do you suspect in the matter? That may throw a light somewhere."

"I don't know what to suspect; I can't suspect anything. I am all at sea about the affair. If I could have found it out myself, think you that I would come here?"

"Well, probably not, that's true."

"And in coming here, I come in confidence. I don't want this to be a newspaper sensation, you understand."

"Certainly not, sir."

"Well, you solve the mystery, chief."

and ten thousand dollars is ready for you."

"The offer of a reward will not make me try any the harder, sir. It might stimulate my men to their best efforts, however, if they need a stimulus."

"Well, use it as you please; I offer that sum for the secret, whatever it may be."

"Now, what can you tell me?"

"Not a thing that you do not know already, sir."

"But, let me see it from your point of view, Mr. VonBronx, and perhaps I may get a new light."

"Well, put yourself in my place, then: Here I am, Dexter VonBronx, a rich man, living in style suitable to my means at Fort Washington. I have two daughters, one aged nineteen, the other twenty-one. My wife is dead. I have a corps of some fifteen servants, and thus we live."

"All the world knows that, Mr. VonBronx."

"Yes, yes; I suppose so, suppose so. We rich fellows have no privacy whatever in this world. But, no matter about that. Now I come to the point: On a certain morning my youngest daughter, Claudia, is found unconscious along the highway, and is brought home to me in a half dazed condition, chilled to the bone from lying out on the cold ground. You know all about that."

"Yes, it was fully reported to me at the time, Mr. VonBronx, but at your command, if you remember, we dropped the matter and suppressed it before it got to the papers."

"And for which I have to thank you."

"Don't mention that, sir. Go on and let me have the rest of the story, from your standpoint."

"Hang it! that is all there is of it, sir. There the whole thing is covered with a veil of mystery that we cannot penetrate. There is where you must take hold."

"Still, you have some further facts of which I am ignorant."

"What are they?"

"You must be aware whether or not your daughter received any bodily abuse or not, on that occasion."

"Ah! true. No, there was not a mark on her person, sir. Our family physician said that she had sustained no injury; and there we are, all in the dark, all in the dark."

"What does your daughter say?"

"She claims that she does not know anything about it."

"Let me see; how was she clad on that occasion? As if for the street, if I remember."

"Yes, just as she would have been if going out for the evening; but she did not go out for the evening, as we happen to know. She was in bed when her sister retired."

"Ha! that deepens the matter considerably."

"Well, I should say so. It is plain that she got up, dressed, and went out after that."

"Nothing plainer, on the face of it, I have to agree with you. Now, what would take her out of the house at an unseemly hour, secretly?"

"That is just the point; that is what I am willing to reward you handsomely for, if you can find it out for me. That is what I want to know—what I must know."

"Have you any suspicions?"

"None, I have told you."

"You are willing to speak out plainly, I suppose?"

"Willing to do anything in the world, sir, that will be of assistance in the matter."

"Well, it is possible that there is a lover—some one who has not your approval—in fact, some one whom you have forbidden—"

"No, no, nothing of the kind. If so, it would be simple enough. My daughter has a lover, Mr. Roger VanBiltder, to whom she is engaged, and the young couple have my hearty approval."

"And there is no other?"

"No; Claudia thinks the world of Roger."

"How does he take the matter?"

"Why, the poor fellow is just about in despair, and I am afraid there is danger of a breaking off."

"And how does your daughter take that?"

"She is in tears, and the deuce is to pay generally. She tells him the same as she tells me, that she knows nothing about the mystery, and there we are stuck."

"And that is all you can tell me?"

"That is every particular of which I have any knowledge."

"Well, it is a poser, sure enough, Mr. VonBronx, but I'll see what I can do for you."

Thereupon the superintendent questioned the millionaire closely, and finally permitted him to take leave, and sent at once for Sam Buckley, who, he thought, was just the man for such a case.

CHAPTER IV.

MAKING A GOOD BEGINNING.

Such, then, was the case Scorcher Sam had in hand.

He wanted to take a preliminary look over the ground, and thought his wheel would nicely serve the purpose.

He rolled easily along at about the regulation gait, finding it but the merest play to propel his special. It ran so easily, with a lazy pressure, that he had to guard against speeding unconsciously.

"Schuessler said I would tire of this," he said to himself; "but I fail to see it, unless I tire of such slow foot-motion. Hang me, if I blame some of the boys and girls for speeding; the temptation is great, on these fine roads. But the safety of all is at stake, and it won't do."

He was admiring his machine as he rode along, making himself acquainted with its individuality—which every wheel certainly has—and at the same time was turning the Washington Heights mystery over in his mind. He was trying to build up a theory that would cover the case at every point, but found it impossible to do so.

He found it a peculiar affair in more respects than one.

All he knew about it, of course, he had received from the superintendent, but he had been given all the essential points.

The fact that Claudia VonBronx was found in street costume was proof that she had gone out secretly and of her own free will. The fact that she denied all knowledge of it, proved that she had a secret to keep.

Such a conclusion was natural.

Now, what that secret was, was the keynote to the whole affair.

So the superintendent had said; so the detective believed, and that was what he was after.

The six miles from the Circle at the corner of Central Park at Fifty-ninth street to Washington Heights was soon covered, and Scorcher Sam was on the spot.

Everybody knows the residence of Millionaire VonBronx, and the detective

turned in that direction, intending to ride slowly past and see if proximity to the scene of the mystery would not inspire a thought which would prove a key to it all.

On turning a corner that brought the front entrance to the grounds in view, what was his surprise to see two young women in handsome bicycle costumes, with wheels to match, just in the act of coming down the broad granite steps to the road, evidently for the purpose of taking a spin on their machines; and he rightly guessed who they were.

"The VonBronx sisters, as I live!" he exclaimed.

He was right; there they were; and as he watched them they mounted and rode away.

They rode in the same direction he was going, and he followed after them at a slow rate of speed, keeping far enough behind not to attract their notice to himself.

They turned into the Fort Washington Ridge Road, going northward, and ere long were going at a rate of speed that would have been denominated a mild scorch a few miles further south. As it was, the place made the difference, and no one interfered.

Scorcher Sam kept the same relative distance from them, and his speed would not have drawn notice even down town, so leisurely was his pedaling. It was the size of his rear wheel, and the gear, with length of "throw," that carried him over the ground at a deceptive rate of speed. The ladies were making almost two foot-motions to his one.

The air was bracing, and they were evidently enjoying it to the full.

Following their course, they rode on till they came to the place where the Ridge Road nearly touches the Boulevard.

There they made their way to the latter thoroughfare, and, continuing on, made the length of the island on the west shore, turning into the Bolton Road for the return spin.

At the point where the Bolton Road curves toward Inwood Station is a delightful little stretch for a spin.

Here the ladies let out their speed.

Really, they were having a race, and Scorcher Sam wheeled up a little nearer to them, enjoying it.

They had not seen him to this time—in fact, had not once looked back during their ride; and, even had they done so, they might have tried the race just the same.

Scorcher Sam had been wishing that chance would offer to make their acquaintance, though he had no reason to entertain any such hope. He certainly could not force himself upon them, and his chance for an introduction was one in ten million, or thereabouts.

Away they went, Sam keeping pace without the least exertion, and there were few people around to observe them.

The detective, in the enjoyment of the sport, gained upon them.

Of a sudden a mishap occurred.

The lady ahead—for one had outstripped the other considerably—was seen to swerve suddenly to one side, as if to escape something that lay in the road, and before she could recover she lost her balance and fell heavily.

Scorcher Sam voiced an ejaculation of surprise and pity, and darted ahead to the rescue.

He passed the other lady, even before she reached the place of the accident, and was the first to lend assistance.

Dismounting, he left his wheel and stooped and lifted the young woman's head, noting that she was not unconscious, but quite dazed for the moment.

"Oh! sir! it is not serious?"

So cried the other, the moment she alighted.

"No, I think not," was the response. "Don't be alarmed."

"Poor Claudia! Do you know me, sister?" stooping and touching her face with her hand.

The other nodded, as yet not able to speak. She was very pale, and Scorcher Sam feared that a limb had been broken.

He looked around to see what had caused her to turn so suddenly, and saw some broken glass that lay in the direct course she had been riding.

He noticed, too, that one of the tires of her bicycle had sustained a bad puncture, and that it was deflated. A repair would be necessary before she could go on.

If it were no worse than that, he would be glad, but he feared that the young lady was more seriously injured than at first appeared. She was very pale, and, though he rubbed her hands briskly, she was slow in recovering.

"How will I ever get her home?" the other was saying, wringing her hands nervously. "What shall I do?"

"Give yourself no uneasiness on that head," said Scorcher Sam. "I am at your service, and will attend to all that, if necessary—which I hope it will not be."

"How can we ever thank you, sir?"

"By not trying to thank me at all, and by saying no more about it. She is recovering."

This was true; the younger of the pair now sat up, looking from one to the other, as if to collect her thoughts to decide who Scorcher Sam was.

"May I assist you to rise?" Sam asked.

"If you please, sir," she answered.

He took hold of her hands, even yet fearing that the damage might be worse than even she knew of, but happily they already knew the worst.

He supported her for a moment, until she was able to stand with the assistance of her sister, when he gave attention to the wheel to learn to what extent it was damaged.

"A punctured tire, I see," he said. "If you will permit me to do so, I will repair it for you."

"Oh! if you only will," said the elder.

"With pleasure."

He had a repair kit on his machine, and with that he speedily repaired the puncture and soon had the tire pumped as hard as before.

"You have done me a very great service, sir," now spoke the younger of the sisters, "and you must permit me to thank you, at least," offering her hand. "I would more fully repay you, if possible."

"This more than repays the slight favor, believe me," said Sam, gallantly, taking the little hand in his own for a moment. "And yet," he added, "could I but know whom I have served it would add to the pleasure it has been to me, I assure you."

"We are the Misses VonBronx," said the elder of the two. "May we inquire to whom we are indebted?"

Sam gave his name.

CHAPTER V.

SCORCHER SAM'S SURPRISE.

Scorcher Sam had gained one point.

He had made the acquaintance—no, not that, either, for the chances were that they would never recognize him again—without the formality of an introduction, which he was never likely to have; but he had seen the VonBronx sisters face to face, and would know either of them at sight anywhere.

They were not particularly handsome young ladies, but were passably good-looking. The younger was the prettier of the two, being a petite blonde with luminous blue eyes. The elder was a brunette, with straight, black brows that did not enhance her beauty. Her eyes were as black as midnight, and in their depths, was suggested a passion that might be intense for good or evil, once fully awakened. Their ages have been stated.

The elder of the two extended her hand to Sam in turn, saying:

"It is a name we shall not soon forget, Mr. Buckley, believe me. You have rendered us a very great service, indeed."

"I am glad the service required was so simple," rejoined the detective, at parting. "I am glad that you came off so well, for the fall you received was no gentle one," to the younger.

"Ah! here comes Mr. VanBiltder," suddenly cried the elder sister. "I must urge you to remain until he comes up, sir."

"Certainly, if you desire it."

A wheelman was approaching, and in a moment more he recognized the ladies and drew up and dismounted.

He was a young man, aged about twenty-five years, rather good-looking, and having the air of a born aristocrat. He looked coldly at Scorcher Sam at the same time that he bowed to the ladies.

There was a great chatter for a moment, while greetings were being exchanged and the mishap made known, and then the elder sister cried:

"I have detained our rescuer, Mr. VanBiltder, in order that you might thank him, too."

"Which is not necessary, since it has been amply done already," said Sam, with a bow, as he prepared to mount his wheel. "It was no more than a mere courtesy of the road, believe me."

The young aristocrat thanked him coldly, and, having mounted, Sam lifted his cap and wheeled away.

At the top of a rise he looked back.

The trio he had just left had mounted their wheels and were going in the opposite direction.

Young VanBiltder had said something about being disappointed of a pleasure, in calling at the house and finding them gone; and Scorcher Sam rightly guessed that they had joined him for a further spin.

"Good enough," said Sam to himself. "I will stop at the mansion and see the governor while they are out."

Continuing on the Bolton Road to Dyckman street, he there struck into the Kingsbridge Road, and ere long was back again at Washington Heights and near the VonBronx mansion.

Carrying his wheel up the granite steps and leaving it just behind the coping, he went up the broad walk to the house.

A footman in livery answered his ring.

"I desire to see Mr. VonBronx," the detective announced.

At the same time he extended a card bearing the name of the superintendent.

Mr. VonBronx had requested of that official that whoever was sent might bring such a card, to avoid mistake.

The footman carried it away, while two other lackies stood like statues in the hall, as if to guard the plate during his absence.

He soon returned.

"Mr. VonBronx will see you, sir," he said.

He made at the same time a perfunctory bow, and indicated that the caller should follow him.

Scorcher Sam followed, of course, and was ushered into a gorgeous library,

where the millionaire sat at a highly polished table engaged in writing.

He kept on writing for some moments, to make the visitor feel his inferiority, perhaps. Then he laid down the pen and faced around in his revolving chair.

He looked well at Sam before he spoke. "So," he said at length, "you are the man selected for my business, are you, young man?"

"Yes, sir," said Sam.

"What is your name?"

"Buckley."

"Sit down, Buckley, and we will talk it over."

Sam took a seat the millionaire indicated, and appeared to be quite at his ease.

"Now, sir," the millionaire continued, "what do you propose doing? I want to know how you are going to work."

"To begin with," said Sam, "I purpose questioning you as closely as possible, to get at the matter from your standpoint. If you are in earnest about having the mystery solved—"

"If I am in earnest! What do you mean, young man?"

"Just what I say: If you are in earnest, you will withhold nothing from me."

The very coolness of the detective nettled the old moneybags, who was used to having men bow and cringe in his presence. Scorcher Sam met him as an equal, on this occasion.

"If I am in earnest!" Mr. VonBronx snorted. "As if I would not be in earnest, desperately in earnest, under such circumstances."

"That is just the point, sir; and, being in earnest, you will welcome my questioning." And immediately he began making inquiries with the directness of a cross-examiner.

Mr. VonBronx met them frankly, and in a little time Sam had covered nearly the whole ground, and had brought out all the facts that had been made known to the superintendent of police.

"Has your daughter ever been known to walk in her sleep?" he further inquired.

"Never. I thought of that, but dismissed the thought."

"And you tell me that your daughter claims to have no knowledge of the matter whatever?"

"That is the story she tells. She remembers going to bed; she awoke in a strange place, chilled to the bone. The wonder is that she did not take cold and die."

"Do you believe her story, or do you doubt it?"

"I have never had reason to doubt her word before, yet this is so very strange—But that is what I want you to settle."

"And what I will undertake to do; but it may require time. Such mysteries, as a usual thing, are not solved in a day. It possibly may take weeks, or even months."

"Yes, yes, I suppose so; but do the best you can."

"I will, sir."

"Are you done?"

"I suppose you are willing to trust me implicitly, Mr. VonBronx?"

"Yes, certainly. There is only one condition to be observed—that is, that this must not come to the newspapers."

"It shall not, through me, sir. What I was going to propose, if it will not take your breath away, that you receive me into your house for a few days as a guest."

The millionaire lay back in his chair and fairly gasped.

"I will send you my card— Better still, I am here in person; son of an old

friend of yours on a visit to the city. You invite me to spend my stay with you. I will have opportunity to get acquainted with your daughters and study the case leisurely."

Mr. VonBronx was still gasping, for the proposition was the coolest he had ever heard in his life.

"Ask a spy into my house!" he presently cried. "Put you on equal footing with my daughters—you, a mere police detective! Why, sir—"

"Say no more about it," said Sam, rising. "I guess you are not so desperately in earnest about having the mystery solved, after all. I'll go back and report that you would not trust—"

"Hold on, young man; give me a minute to think. In what other way can I hope to have the mystery solved, if I close this opportunity against you? Besides, to refuse would be to distrust your superintendent. I'll do it; it shall be as you have suggested."

At that moment the door opened, and Amelia VonBronx entered the room.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ELDER SISTER'S OPINION.

Scorcher Sam had gained a big point.

It was something he had never dreamed of, on coming there.

The thought was one that came to his mind after having studied well the man with whom he was dealing.

Sam was a keen judge of human nature, and an hour in a man's company was usually sufficient to read him thoroughly and weigh him in the balance. He had weighed Mr. VonBronx.

The detective rose immediately when the young lady entered, and she, on seeing him, gave a great start, looking from him to her father, and there was a momentary awkward silence, for the millionaire was taken aback by this sudden interruption.

"Pardon me, papa," the young lady quickly said. "I was not aware that you had company. I merely ran in to say that Mr. VanBiltder will lunch with us."

"You mean Roger?"

"Yes."

"Very well. But, wait, my daughter; let me introduce Mr. Buckley, son of an old acquaintance. I have just extended an invitation to him to spend his visit in the city with us."

Scorcher Sam was pleased with the way the old gentleman had saved the day, as he mentally put it.

The young woman looked the surprise she felt.

"Indeed!" she exclaimed. "Is it possible? Let me welcome you, Mr. Buckley," advancing and giving her hand. "The second time we have met this morning, papa."

"I am more than honored," said Sam. "Believe me, I had no thought of this when I called to pay my respects to your father. The first meeting was merely one of passing chance, Mr. VonBronx," he added.

"And a most fortunate chance for us," cried Amelia, who proceeded to tell about it.

The millionaire looked at the detective admiringly while the young lady was speaking, accrediting to his detective skill the whole occurrence, as Sam read his thoughts.

"But you made no mention of knowing papa," said the young lady, when she had finished.

"It would have been like forcing myself upon you," Sam replied.

"Well, you will lunch with us, and send for your baggage, of course, Mr. Buckley?"

"In this costume?" queried Sam.

"Certainly; we can overlook that, under the circumstances."

"Then I will do myself the honor to remain, after which I will return to my hotel and prepare to accept your kind invitation."

A few further remarks, and the young lady withdrew.

"How was that done?" asked the old gentleman, rather proudly.

"Excellent!" complimented the detective. "It shall be my endeavor to play the part of guest so well that the most fastidious could find no fault in me. I appreciate the trust you repose in me, and will conduct myself accordingly."

"Of course, young man, of course. I shall hold your superintendent accountable for that."

"He is willing."

"But, your first name? A man of my years cannot 'mister' you."

"Not only my first name, but a good many other minor points must be well understood between us," said the detective.

By the time lunch was ready, Mr. VonBronx and the detective had come to a perfect understanding. Scorcher Sam had outlined the role he would play, with the master of the house to back him.

It was a peculiar situation for Scorcher Sam. It was one that placed him on his honor as a guest, while at the same time he was there in the capacity of a detective to ferret out a secret of the family—if such a secret existed.

Where all were clouded in mystery respecting the adventure the younger Miss VonBronx had undergone, his mission was one of a peculiarly delicate kind—one that he would have to handle with care.

He was introduced to Miss Claudia and Mr. VanBiltder, and fell into his place naturally.

He noticed that VanBiltder did not regard him with much favor, and his suspicion was that the young man was inclined to be jealous without reason.

The fact that he had that morning lent assistance to the young lady at the time of her accident, and now on top of that to find him a guest of the family, gave the young scion uneasiness.

The hour at the table was made use of by Sam to give the others a good impression of himself, for he was equal to the role.

Though a poor man, yet Sam had been college-trained, and was a gentleman born.

Lunch over, Sam escorted Miss VonBronx from the room.

She conducted him to the drawing-room, where they sat down for a chat before he took leave temporarily.

"What is occupying your thoughts, Mr. Buckley?" she was presently led to ask, as he seemed preoccupied and failed for a moment to respond to a query she had made.

"Your pardon," he said quickly. "I cannot get out of mind what your father was telling me about a strange adventure your sister had a little time ago. The strangest thing I ever heard of. I beg your pardon, but what did you ask me?"

He noted that this caused her a start, and that her keen, black eyes gave him a searching look.

"Papa was surely not so indiscreet—" But there she paused.

"He knew I would honor his confidence—"

"Certainly; I beg your pardon, Mr. Buckley. But it seems so strange that he would speak of it at all."

"It appears to be greatly on his mind," said the detective. "I know he would give much if the mystery could be cleared away."

"So would we all," declared the young lady. "Pray do not speak of it to my sister; she is very sensitive about it, and it causes her pain to have it mentioned."

"Naturally, it must. For her sake it ought to be cleared away, if possible. But that is out of the question, of course. Still, I cannot help it if it forces itself upon my mind. It is a very strange matter, and no wonder your father is exercised. What is your opinion of it, Miss VonBronx?"

"Dear me! I have no opinion; I am mystified. It is a very painful matter, Mr. Buckley."

"Yes, I know it must be. I will not speak of it again. I would not have done so now, had I not felt bound to explain when asked what was occupying my thoughts."

"It has given us a great deal of worry."

"And your father spoke as if he would like to have the matter fully investigated, were it not for the dread of having it get into the papers."

"He must never do that! We could never bear the notoriety, Mr. Buckley. I have influence with him, and I must appeal to him again not to do that. It would kill Claudia."

"I beg pardon for continuing the subject. Shall we let it drop, Miss VonBronx?"

"Since papa has taken you into his confidence, and as for the time being you are one of us, I will tell you just what I think, Mr. Buckley."

"You honor me."

"I believe that, unknown to any of us, Claudia is a somnambulist. In no other way can it be accounted for."

"That is what I suggested to your father, but he declared it could not be so; if such were the fact, he argued, the family would have had knowledge of it before; and that looks reasonable."

"True; and yet, may it not be of recent manifestation?"

"There is a good point, Miss VonBronx. Perhaps you have solved the whole matter with that simple suggestion. I suppose care is being taken that it may not be repeated."

"Oh! to be sure. One of the servants is required to sleep by Claudia's door, unknown to her, and the front doors are so secured at night that she could not possibly open them in her sleep. It will be impossible for the sad occurrence to be repeated."

Others entered, just then, and the matter was dropped for the time being, but Scorcher Sam had gained another step in the matter of mystery; he had drawn out the elder sister's view and her opinion.

CHAPTER VII.

SOCIETY SEVERLY SHOCKED.

Scorcher Sam found himself in a peculiar situation.

There were some things which he had not paused to consider when making his proposition to Mr. VonBronx.

He was thrown into the company of young VanBiltder, who, meeting him on even footing in the home of their host, was bound to treat him as an equal, whether it pleased him to do so or not.

VanBiltder, occupying as he did the position of prospective son-in-law, felt it all the more incumbent upon him to do what he could to entertain the friend of the family, and as a result he invited Sam to accompany him to one of the most exclusive clubs in the city.

Sam was in a dilemma.

To refuse would be to slight the young scion of wealth; to accept was to run the risk of recognition.

He could afford to hazard neither, just at that time, and so he stood, as it were, between two fires. But he had to choose; so he chose to accept the invitation.

One reason, he might never get another chance to invade the sacred precincts of that particular club.

He went.

This was when he had been two days a guests of the VonBronxs.

Meantime, he had been able to learn nothing about the mystery that he had undertaken to solve.

On one occasion he talked with the victim of the misadventure herself, her father having opened it, but he learned nothing. He was as much in the dark as the others.

He learned something along other lines, however, of which more anon.

The afternoon following the night of the visit to the club, young VanBiltder called at the VonBronx mansion in a state of great excitement.

He wanted to see Mr. VonBronx, and his request was urgent. He was shown into the library, where he paced around and snorted with overpressure of indignation, asking that the family be called there at once.

"See here, what is the matter with you, Roger?" demanded VonBronx, after a few moments of the agony.

"A cad, sir! a deuced cad and spy!" cried the scion.

"Who is a cad and spy?"

"Who? Who but your guest, sir! He is a police detective, nothing more; a common fellow. And to think that I took him to my club!"

"Look here, Roger, here is a mistake," said VonBronx, eager to have the matter hushed before it came to his daughters' ears. "You had better have a care how you make such charge."

"But I can prove it, sir; I can prove it!"

Just at that moment Miss VonBronx entered the room, and she stopped with amazement.

"What is—"

"A cad—a spy!" cried the boiling VanBiltder. "Your Mr. Buckley is a police detective!"

And to make the scene all the more painful, Sam at that moment came along the hall in company with Miss Claudia.

"What is amiss here?" Scorcher Sam inquired, stepping coolly into the room. "Did some one make the remark that I am a police detective?"

Young VanBiltder was as red as a beet.

"Yes, sir," he cried, "you heard some one say so, and it was I. You are Sam Buckley, the police detective; I make the charge, and defy you to deny it."

The sister had drawn back, and with hands clasped, looked on painfully.

Mr. VonBronx stood leaning with his hands on the polished library table, pale and red by turns, much agitated.

It was a painful situation for them all, all, perhaps, save the detective, who seemed to be the coolest person in the group.

"I suppose you are prepared to prove the charge you make, Mr. Van Biltder?" he queried.

"Prove it? Of course if I can prove it!"

"What is your proof?"

"The word of two members of the club who happen to know you, sir."

"That ought to be sufficient, certainly. The word of gentlemen of that club is not to be doubted."

"See, he does not deny it!" cried Van Biltder, turning to Mr. VonBronx.

"But, papa, you introduced him to us," said Miss VonBronx, who was very pale and much agitated.

"And we have accepted him in good faith," said Miss Claudia. "Surely, there must be some mistake, Roger. Are you quite—"

"Of course I am certain," snapped VanBiltder. "Two of my friends asked me this morning what I was doing in company with Sam Buckley the detective. They are positive."

"But, papa, you know him, don't you?" asked Miss VonBronx.

"Did he not come here and introduce himself?" asked VanBiltder. "He has imposed upon us all!"

Scorcher Sam saw that Van Biltder was more than eager to prove the charge he had made, and, of course, that it would be easy for him to do so. Sam had expected it would come.

VanBiltder was inclined to be jealous. "Papa, why don't you speak?" cried Miss VonBronx.

"Yes, prove that it is not true," urged Miss Claudia, eagerly.

Van Biltder gave her a look that was intended to be severe, and shrugged his shoulders.

"What have you to say, sir?" Mr. VonBronx demanded.

He had been racking his brain to find some way out of the difficulty.

This placed him in a sorry situation, unless the detective saw fit to help him through with it.

Scorcher Sam took the hint and his cue from this demand, and saw what was required of him. He decided to bear all the blame himself.

The fact of the matter was, he might need the further co-operation of Mr. VonBronx before the case was done with, and it would pay for him to shelter the old gentleman.

"I admit that the charge is true," said Sam, calmly. "I have imposed upon you, Mr. VonBronx."

The millionaire breathed easier.

He also gave Sam a look of admiration, as much as to say—"Good for you, my boy; you shall lose nothing by it!"

The young ladies drew still further away, the elder more pale than ever, the younger looking not only alarmed but rather disappointed and pained.

Mr. VonBronx tried to look severe.

"You dare to tell me to my face that you have imposed upon me!" he cried. "Shall I have you thrown out of doors?"

Young VanBiltder looked pleased immensely.

"I would much prefer to go out unaided, sir," said Sam. "I will pack my trunk and take quiet leave. But, a word of explanation is due these ladies, in justice to myself."

Mr. VonBronx looked alarmed at that.

"Make it short," he said.

"You, sir, requested the chief of police to try to solve the mystery surrounding the misadventure of your younger daughter, your love for your child being the prompter. I came here quietly for that purpose. Let my conduct while under your roof be my sponsor."

"Ah! now I remember," said Mr. VonBronx. "I did so request the chief of police, but little thought at the time that it would be undertaken in just this manner. Under the circumstances I will not censure you more than I have done already. But, if that was your object, what have you accomplished? Mind you, I said to the chief that this must not reach the press."

"It certainly will not, through me, sir."

"Very good."

"Well, I have been unable to solve the mystery, sir, save by speculation. Your elder daughter has suggested that it must have been a case of somnambulism, just manifested for the first time."

"Ah! perhaps that is it, after all."

"In the absence of any other explanation, sir, it is a reasonable one. Now, do you desire the case dropped?"

"Let it be dropped, by all means, papa," urged Miss VonBronx. "It can do no good to seek further. Let the gentleman take leave, and withdraw the matter from the hands of the police, please."

"Very well, it shall be as you say."

CHAPTER VIII.

MATTER HANDLED WITH GLOVES.

Miss VonBronx turned and left the room without even a glance at the detective.

Mr. VanBiltder offered his arm to Miss Claudia, and, under the painful circumstances, she was obliged to follow in like manner.

Not to be supposed for a moment that young ladies of the aristocracy could for a moment recognize a police detective, and as they left the room VanBiltder gave Sam a look of triumph.

Scorcher Sam took it all as a matter of fact. It was something that he might have expected—in fact, that he had looked for, and hence it was no surprise to him when it came. When they had gone he closed the door and was alone with Mr. VonBronx.

"Let me thank you, young man, for saving my feelings," said the millionaire.

"Say nothing about it," said Sam, carelessly. "Much better as it is, of course. But, do you wish to call me off from the case in reality?"

"What do you think about it?"

"I don't believe it has been explained, sir."

"Then the sleep-walking—"

"I do not accept that as the true explanation, although it is a good temporary excuse. There is something deeper back of it all, Mr. VonBronx."

"You think so?"

"I feel certain of it, sir."

"What reason have you for supposing such to be the case?"

"Well, here is one single point: Persons walking in their sleep usually go out of doors in their night attire."

"By George! I had not thought of that."

"Whereas, your daughter was arrayed for the street, even to vail and overshoes, if I have been rightly informed. I do not accept the sleep-walking theory for a moment."

"You said nothing of this before my daughters."

"It is better for their peace of mind, perhaps, to let them have that for their comfort."

"But, if not that, then what?"

"There is the mystery, and so I ask you whether or not you want me to carry further the investigation."

"What if I say yes? Do you think there will be any chance of your solving the enigma?"

"I cannot promise that I will be able to do that."

"Do you think you can?"

"I can try."

"Well, another thing, before I give you the authority to proceed: Do you hold my daughter blameless?"

"Which one?"

"Which one, sir? Why do you ask that?"

"Because you have two daughters, Mr. VonBronx. You did not specify the one."

"But, as you well know, it was Claudia who had the unfortunate misadventure."

"Her I hold blameless, sir."

"Then why did you mention the other?"

"Because, to tell you privately, I am satisfied that she knows more about the matter than she has seen fit to tell."

"You do?" with amazement.

"I do."

"I'll question her about that—"

"Not for the world, Mr. VonBronx."

"And why not?"

"You might alarm her needlessly, and close the very door I hope to open, if you wish me to continue the investigation."

"Well, well, I am more mystified than ever, Mr. Buckley. I cannot believe that you would speak thus without good reason for so doing, sir."

"I certainly would not."

"Then what are your reasons?"

"To explain all that, sir, would be to go into a lot of petty details that would only bore you. Pray accept the general statement instead, and let me go on to the finish."

"Why do you desire to do that? Suppose I order you to stop where you are?"

"Then you desire not to carry it on?"

"I don't."

"In that event, I will let it drop, of course; but my curiosity has been awakened to a great degree, and I would like to finish the case for the sake of solving the mystery."

"You still pledge yourself to keep it from the press?"

"I do."

"And you will hold in sacred confidence anything you may learn that may not be agreeable to me?"

"I will."

"Then you have leave to go ahead to a finish. I cannot stop here, if there is a possible chance to carry it to a termination and learn the true secret of the matter."

"I thought that would be your decision, sir. And now on your own part—"

"What?"

"Your daughters understand that you will withdraw the matter from the hands of the police."

"Yes; so Amelia requested, at any rate."

"And so you promised?"

"I believe I did."

"That can be arranged. You can write a letter to the chief, allow your daughters to see it, and to make it the more perfect, send a footman to post it, in their presence."

"But the effect of that will be to have you recalled."

"No, I will go and explain the situation. It will be a step toward the solution, Mr. VonBronx."

"You think so?"

"I know it."

"Very well, I trust you. You are a smart young fellow, Buckley, and I rather like you. I leave it entirely in your hands."

"Thank you, Mr. VonBronx. Whatever I may learn, I will come to you in confidence with it before reporting. I suspect even now, that it will be something you would suppress."

"See here, you know more than you are willing to tell me now, young man."

"I assure you, sir, that I am in possession of no positive knowledge in the case, though I will admit that I have pointers in certain directions."

"What are they, then?"

"As I said, the telling would involve a lot of petty detail. Wait until I have a case to lay before you. As things are, I would only be able to give you unfounded indications."

"Well, well, I must defer to your practical judgment in the affair, I suppose. But, when do you think you will have something to report?"

"Impossible to say. A week, a month, two months—impossible to set a time."

"Well, go ahead."

"I may have occasion to call and see you and in that event—"

"That would prove me a falsifier, and show my daughters that you are still working on the case."

"No, no, not necessarily. I will come in a disguise, and will present a duplicate of this card," taking a card and writing a name on it as he spoke.

"Very well; I rely on you. There is a mystery in this house that must be fathomed, no matter at what cost, and I believe you are the man to do it. You have inspired me with confidence."

A few words more, and the detective took his leave.

He had gone but a little time when Miss VonBronx joined her father in the library.

"Father, do you really mean to let this matter drop?" she asked. "You detained that man quite a little while, I noticed."

"There is a practical way to answer that, to your satisfaction," said the millionaire. "I will drop a note to the chief while it is fresh in mind." And he proceeded to write it.

When it was done he pushed it over for his daughter to read, then sealed it in her presence and asked her to see that it was mailed.

CHAPTER IX.

SCORCHING AFTER A RUNAWAY.

Mr. VonBronx was in a quandary.

After that letter was posted he fell to thinking, pacing the floor of his library.

There was something peculiar about the situation, as it stood thus far developed. The detective had said something that called his elder daughter into suspicion.

It might have stopped at that, so far as the old gentleman's peace of mind was concerned, but her eagerness to have the police called off, and her satisfaction when she carried away the letter that, presumably, took the matter out of their hands, were noticeable.

"I can't understand, I can't understand," the old gentleman repeated to himself time after time. "Claudia innocent of it all, Amelia with more knowledge than she has let out, the sleep-walking denied—What does it all mean, anyhow? Well, I can only trust to that young man, and I believe he will in time solve the mystery."

Meantime, Scorcher Sam had gone to headquarters.

Not directly, for he went first to his lodging, where he made a change and got out his wheel.

For a few days he had not had the pleasure of a spin, and felt inclined to take one as soon as he had paid his respects to his superior and reported.

"Well, Sam, what word?" the chief asked.

"I have been fired," answered the scorcher, with a smile.

"Fired?"

"Yes. I have been hobnobbing with millionaires for a day or two, but they got on to me at last."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I have been the guest of Mr. VonBronx."

"Get out!"

"Fact, sure as you live. Might have worked in to marry one of the daughters, if they had given me a little more time."

"Well, you had better take the time off, I would say, and go back and complete the arrangement. Fine opening for a young man like you, very. I advise you to go back."

"I see you believe I am joking about having been there at all, but I assure you it is all straight. What is more, you will soon receive a letter from the old gentleman calling off your sleuths, but that is only for effect; I am to continue on the case just the same."

Thereupon Sam gave all the particulars, his superior listening with close attention.

"You have done well, Sam, mighty well," he complimented. "Not every detective would have had the nerve for that."

"It was not so much the nerve as it was the ability to fill the role after getting the footing. I tell you, I rather enjoyed it, too; think I'll set out to be a millionaire myself."

"Well, what of your suspicions, or theories?"

"Now you touch upon delicate ground," said Scorcher Sam. "There is a skeleton in that closet."

"You think so, do you?"

"I am pretty certain of it. However, I have no clew to it, as yet."

"What do you suspect, then?"

"Foul play right in that household."

"Ha! that begins to meet the first view I took of it, but which I kept to myself."

"I think I will be able to prove it before I let go of the matter. I have taken a hard nut to crack, though, and it may take a good while to get at the meat of it."

"No matter, take your time. I am curious, now, to see what will be the outcome."

Scorcher Sam explained fully all his suspicions, and his reasons for them, and his plan of action met approval.

When he left the office he set out for a turn on the Boulevard, for, as we have seen, he had not been allowed the privilege of a spin recently.

He had not gone a great distance when he met Patrolman Gilles.

Gilles was on foot, and looked somewhat muddled up, as if he had been in a melee of some kind.

Scorcher Sam stopped and dismounted.

"Hello, John!" he greeted.

"How do, Sam?" the response.

"What's the matter? Where's your wheel?"

"Nothing left of it but the wind that was in the tires," with a grim smile.

"Then you have been brushing up against a cyclone, or something of that kind, I take it. What was it?"

"Have just caught a runaway team, that's all. A merchant of Eighth Avenue had his wife out riding, and the horses got out of his control and made things lively, I tell you."

"But, you stopped them?"

"Sure; but my wheel suffered. Not a whole spoke left in it."

"You'll get another. The runaway might have killed a dozen people if you hadn't stopped 'em."

They talked for a few minutes and parted, and Scorcher Sam went on his way, little thinking that he was soon to have a similar experience.

Presently he heard shouting behind him, and looked around.

Coming straight toward him was a team of horses, madly plunging, with a carriage containing a man and a woman.

Scorcher Sam had just time enough to swerve to the left and allow the maddened horses to dash by, and he was after them immediately at top speed.

The loud shouting of the people along the sidewalks cleared the way ahead, and there was practically a clear track for a long race, unless there came a collision at some corner.

But Scorcher Sam did not mean that it should be a race of long duration.

With a machine such as his, it was no trouble for him to gain upon the runaway, and presently he was alongside the carriage.

"Oh! Mr. Buckley!" cried the woman in the carriage. "Save us! Do save our lives!"

Sam believed he recognized the voice.

He could not look to make sure, for his wheel and the team demanded his whole attention.

Forward he ran, taking care not to foul with the flying hoofs, and on gaining the horses' heads he reached out with his right hand and laid hold upon the bridle.

The horse reared and plunged, almost lifting Sam clear of his wheel, but having a firm grip upon the centre of the handle-bar with his left hand, he managed to keep upright.

It was a ticklish situation, but he had been there before.

There is a right and a wrong way to catch a runaway, on a wheel, and the bicycle cops have learned it by experience.

Only one hand can be used, the other must hold the wheel steady, and the wheel must be kept as far out as circumstances will allow to avoid the horses' hoofs.

This Sam was practicing, allowing his wheel to slant slightly and holding it steady to the movements of the horses.

The weight on the bit soon began to tell.

The proud animal's head came down, its speed slackened, and finally both were brought to a standstill, and Sam was still mounted. His wheel had not received a scratch, and he was not a little proud of the achievement, for it is not often that the rider of the "bike" will come off so well.

Having stopped them, Sam looked towards the carriage.

It contained Amelia VonBronx and a gentleman whom Scorcher Sam had never seen before.

"How can we thank you enough?" said Amelia, graciously extending her hand to Sam. "It looks as if a kind Providence had brought you here so opportunely!"

"Glad that I have been able to be of service," said Sam, lifting his cap, while he eyed her companion.

"Accept my hearty thanks, sir," said the man. "You have the honor to know him, then?" turning to his companion.

"In a manner, yes; he is Mr. Sam Buckley, of the police."

"Ah! thank you, Buckley. Good service. Thanks." And with that he drew up on the lines and drove on, the team now quiet enough.

CHAPTER X.

STIRRING SENSATION.

"Now, then, a new development," said Scorcher Sam to himself, when the carriage had gone on. "Who was that gentleman? Some one I did not meet when I was visiting the family."

He smiled to himself with satisfaction as he thought of that experience.

"He gave me rather a snub, after my saving his precious neck for him, and I would like to call him down for it. But, no matter, I have got to expect that; I am only a police detective, while he—Well, he passes for a gentleman, but I'll bet it's veneer."

The crowd on the sidewalks, meantime, had given a hearty cheer for the brave performance, and now a "bike cop" came along.

It happened to be Thomsen.

Coming from the opposite direction, he had just passed the carriage.

He had witnessed the rescue at rather long range, and was on the ground as soon as possible.

"That was well done, Sam," he complimented. "This is the place for you, after all. You are a credit to the corps."

"And do you mean that I'm a better runaway-catcher than I am a detective, eh?"

"I hope you are as good a detective, that's all."

"Well, thank you, anyhow. Come, ride along with me for a way."

Thomsen turned and pedaled along with Sam in the direction he was going.

"Did you know the chap in the carriage?" Sam inquired.

"That fellow? That was Anton Gashwick, the sport from the West, whose horses have been cutting such big swaths on the tracks this season."

"Whew! is that so?"

"That is who he is. His dad is a heavy silver king, and he is right in the swim here in New York."

"Yes, I have heard about him. Didn't know he had the entree to such exclusive families. But, it is money does the business, after all, and they are only flesh and blood, the best of them."

"That's about right."

"Did you know the young woman with him?"

"No."

"That was Miss VonBronx."

"I supposed you must know her, the way you spoke. I have seen her before."

"With him?"

"No, with another chap."

"Dark fellow, with a foreign look?"

"Exactly."

"That was Gustav Berkmann. I know something about him. He is a count, no 'count, or something in that line, looking for an American pocket-book; but I don't believe he will find one there."

"You think the other fellow has the best show?"

"I think he has the better chance of the two, yes; but neither of them is in it to his neck, according to my way of thinking."

"Then there is a dark horse, eh?"

"I am inclined to think the young woman is her own dark horse."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, more than I can explain, Thomsen; pardoning my mentioning it. I think I will run on and keep them in sight."

"You are interested in that direction, it seems."

"Well, yes, but say nothing about it."

"All right, old man."

They presently parted, and Scorcher Sam spurred up to the limit and ran along after the carriage, soon coming up with it again, falling in close behind it.

It was an open affair, with a top that fell behind, and enough room behind and under that for three or four wheelmen to run along at even pace with the vehicle and not be seen by those occupying the single seat. And there Sam wheeled quietly onward.

The man and the young woman were talking, but it was only now and again

that Sam could catch a word, and that not important.

Of a sudden the carriage slackened its speed.

Scorcher Sam had been constantly on the alert for this, or else he might have come to grief.

He brought his wheel almost to an instant stop, by a certain trick he had practiced for a long time, letting it go again the next instant, but at a very slow speed.

In another moment he stopped short.

The carriage had done the same, and not only so, but was inclined to back—in fact, did back for a yard or two.

Sam was off his wheel instantly and on his feet on the ground, and in the same instant he heard a loud and angry exclamation, and with it the crack of a whip.

"Take that!" was the cry, "and that, you dog!"

Scorcher Sam was out from behind the carriage instantly, to see what was going on.

A man on horseback, a dark man with a foreign air and manner, had ridden up close to the carriage, and was raining blows upon the man in the carriage with a short whip.

"Count!" cried Miss VonBronx. "What are you thinking about?"

"The false friend!" cried the enraged foreigner, who, nevertheless had a command of English and a good pronunciation. "He deserves it all!"

"Let up, curse you!" cried the driver of the carriage. "If you do not, by heavens, I'll shoot you!"

It had taken place in a brief second or two.

Scorcher Sam forced in between the mounted man and the carriage, and seized the descending whip arm.

"Stop this!" he cried. "You are arrested!"

"Am I?"

The man wrenched his wrist free, and Sam received a cut with the whip full in the face.

At the same moment, the occupant of the carriage, relieved from the stinging lash, touched his horses with the whip, and the carriage rolled away immediately.

Scorcher Sam and the man on horseback were left for the crowd to gape at. Sam was at a disadvantage.

He was on the ground, had his wheel in his left hand, and the man was plying the whip.

"I'll stop your game!" cried Sam, and he dropped his wheel and made a leap at the man to drag him from his horse. In the moment that Sam was dropping his wheel, however, the man struck the horse a cut.

Away the animal leaped, and Sam was thrown to the ground on his hands and one knee.

The crowd shouted after the fellow, but he sent them back a laugh of defiance and went speeding away down the street.

A man had run out from the sidewalk and picked up Sam's wheel, and as Sam scrambled up out of the dust the wheel was all ready for him to mount and give chase.

Scorcher Sam was in the saddle in an instant, with a word to the man who had helped him, and was off in pursuit.

His blood was boiling, and he meant to have his man.

Putting forth all his strength, he was fairly flying in a few moments, and was rapidly overhauling the object of his wrath.

The man chanced to look back, and seeing him coming, plied the whip to his horse and put it to a dead run, and thus they went, wheel against horse, down the thoroughfare.

Now, as the best bicycle speed is about equal to the best trotting speed recorded, and as running speed is considerably faster, it might be questioned what chance Scorcher Sam had in trying to overhaul a running horse; but we shall see as to that.

In the first place, the horse was not a Ten Broeck or a Brambaletta, and the place was not a race-course. The rider was in danger any moment of being held up by the police, while Scorcher Sam, being of the police himself, had nothing of that kind to look out for. Then, while the way was clear for the horseman it certainly was clear for the wheelman. The moment it became obstructed, then the man on the wheel must gain ground. And so they went, the horse at its best and Sam at his swiftest pace on his special.

CHAPTER XI.

SCORCHER SAM STATES TERMS.

Hardly a day passes but the Boulevard, or some other fine cycling thoroughfare, sees some exciting event of the kind.

In some instances it is the fresh young man who comes out on purpose to have fun with the "bike cop," and who usually brings up in a station and appears in court next morning.

Then there are the runaways, with the blue-coat wheelman flying after them and bringing them up with a round turn, sometimes with risk to neck and damage to wheel; and occasionally a chase after a thief by way of variety; but a wheelman after a horseman is a rarity.

After going a little distance further the man looked back again.

Seeing that he had not perceptibly distanced the wheelman, a troubled look came over his face and he plied the whip the more.

Scorcher Sam could not do any more than he was already doing, but he kept that up with grim determination. His face still tingled with the cut from the whip.

People on the sidewalks stopped and stared, those on the street got out of the way as speedily as possible, save the vehicles, and the horseman threaded his way in and out among these with danger to all concerned. And after him sped the swiftest wheelman in New York.

Such a race could not long be kept up, and the police not take a hand in it.

Already two besides Scorcher Sam were in the heat, and others were appearing ahead to intercept the reckless horseman.

One of the first-mentioned was Thomsen, with whom Sam had been talking only a little while before, and as Sam crept up to him he was eager to know who the man was.

"What did he do?" he asked.

"Struck me with his whip, confound him!"

"Who is he?"

"The black-and-tan foreigner I was telling you about."

"Ha! that so? What set him on to you? You seem to be in it all around."

Scorcher Sam told him briefly, slackened his speed just a trifle while doing so, and then on he shot again, the others hard after him.

The detective on wheels would have caught his man, not a doubt of it, eventually, for the steed he was on was tireless, but the race came to a sudden termination.

The officers ahead barred the way and shouted to the reckless rider to stop, and seeing that there was no escape, he slackened his speed to obey, and in another quarter of a minute Scorcher Sam came

speeding up, leaped from his wheel, and jerked the fellow out of the saddle.

"You would strike me with your whip, eh?" he cried.

The man was no weakling, and he grappled with Sam, but the scorcher laid him on his back in about two seconds, and not gently, either.

One of the foot policemen caught and held the horse, and another officer laid hold upon Sam, not knowing who he was. But he was soon told by Thomsen, who just then came up.

"He's one of us," he said. "The other fellow is the man you want."

"And I have got him dead to rights," said the other, who had a knee on his breast and his club lifted threateningly.

"Don't kill him, though," laughed Sam. "Let him up, and we'll see what he has to say for himself. I want a minute's talk with him before you run him in."

The man was allowed to rise, and he was furious.

"Outrage!" he snorted. "I would have you know that I am Count Gustav Berkmann! I will have you stripped of your uniforms and displaced, every one of you, dogs of police!"

"Meantime, it is our inning first, sir," said Scorcher Sam. "If I were not an officer, I would mar your good looks to a considerable degree for that cut with the whip you gave me. What did you strike me for, anyhow?"

"What did you interfere with me for?"

"Because you were breaking the law, reason good and sufficient."

"Breaking the laws! Has a man no right to chastise a coward and villain, then, when he deserves it?"

"Not on the public street, at any rate. But, what is the matter between you and Anton Gashwick?"

"That is my private affair, sir."

"Very well."

"I have seen you before, have I not?"

"You must have a bad memory if you can't recall where," said Sam.

"Ha! it was at Mr. Von—at a house where we met on even footing, and to find you a police officer!"

"Don't faint, my dear count; you may meet with stranger things than that, if you remain long enough in this country. You must get over being surprised."

"I am disgraced again. A common policeman!"

"And one who will do himself the honor of putting you in a cell for a night's lodging," said Sam. "That cut smarts yet, my dear count."

"You will lock me up? What have I done, that you can lock me up? You were the one to interfere, and how was I to know that you were an officer? You are not in uniform."

"You have been breaking the speed ordinance, that is enough. Come along with me."

"No, I will not!"

"You will go peaceably or you will go handcuffed; make your mind up quick."

There was no doubting that Sam meant just what he said.

"Well, if I must go— But, you shall pay for this, I swear it!"

"You had better make no threats in the presence of witnesses, least of all."

"But, my horse!"

"Where did you hire it? It will be sent back there."

The man named the place, and Sam took him off, while the others dispersed the crowd.

Scorcher Sam had his wheel with him still, and his prisoner was given to understand at the outset that it would be useless for him to try to escape.

He appreciated that fact, however.

With the understanding that he was to be allowed to walk free, he gave his word that he would not try to escape.

Scorcher Sam kept close to him, however, for two reasons. One, he did not mean to give him the chance to try escaping the other, he wanted to talk with him.

"Count, what is the matter between you and Gashwick?" he asked.

"What is that to you?"

"It may be a good deal to me."

"I don't see how. It is no affair of yours."

"I take it that you would not care to have the lady's name appear in the papers to-morrow."

"How can it appear?"

"Why, easily. The Count Berkmann, arrested for horsewhipping Anton Gashwick, while in company with Amelia VonBronx, the charming elder daughter of Mr. Dexter VonBronx—"

"Good heavens! That must not appear."

"What is to hinder it?"

"Can't you stop it?"

"As a favor to you, after striking me with your whip? Oh, yes, I'm a fairly bubbling over with such charity as that, my dear count."

"But, the lady; think of the lady, sir."

"I prefer to think about something else. You hope to marry her, and this little bit of notoriety will no doubt be appreciated by your people—it certainly will be sensational."

"It must not come out, sir; I tell you it must not come out. Can't you suppress it?"

"I think I can, certainly; but why should I do so?"

"For her sake."

"I will use my best influence in that direction, on one condition, my dear count."

"Name the condition. I will do anything rather than that her name should become notorious in the columns of common newspapers. Heavens! my chance would be forever ruined!"

"Well, you tell me what is the trouble between you and the Westerner, and answer some other questions correctly, and I'll try to suppress certain parts of the scandal for you. Refuse me, and I'll give the reporters a fat thing for their papers."

CHAPTER XII.

THE COUNT COUNTED IN IT.

Scorcher Sam held the better hand.

Not only so, but he knew it, and he knew that the other knew it, too.

"Very well, I will do that, willingly," said the count, glad that the conditions were so light.

"All right, fire ahead and give me the facts. I am not a reporter, so you needn't fear to speak right out. In fact, that is what you must do."

"Will you let me go, if I tell you everything?"

"Not a bit of it. As one of the bicycle corps, I must enforce the regulations, to say nothing about the cut you gave me in the face—"

"You are holding me for revenge, that is all. If I hadn't struck you you would let me go. I wouldn't have done that, if I had known you were an officer, believe me."

"Oh, no, count, you wrong me there; I would hold you anyhow; but since you did strike me I will admit that it is all the more satisfaction to hand you over for a night in the cooler, since I am debarred from punching your head for you, as I would like to do."

"Well, if you insist, I will tell you nothing."

"All right; I know half a dozen reporters who can make a thrilling story out of the simple facts, and the names will insure its appearing with scare head lines."

"Zounds! Well, what is it you want to know?"

Sam's hand was invincible, as said:

"I want to know what is the trouble between you and Gashwick."

"Curse him! he is my rival. I was sure of Miss VonBronx before he came into the field."

"You called him a false friend."

"So he is."

"In what respect?"

"It was I introduced him into the VonBronx home."

"Ah! I see. And now you are chewing your head off for doing it, since he has ousted you in the affections of the elder daughter."

"Curse you! you make my wound all the deeper. Yes, I could run him through with a sword with a good will. I only wish I could make him fight me, I would not spare him!"

"But, are you sure you had the affection of the lady?"

"What do you mean?"

"The little I saw while I was a guest there led me to think that she did not care a fiddler's jig for you."

"But I am sure she did care for me. I was devoted to her, and was paving the way toward a speedy proposal when he came along and in some way lured her from me—curse him!"

"Your liberality with your curses does not harm any one, neither does it do your cause any good, that I can see. My opinion is that she did not care for you, but seeing that you were coming to business, gave her attention to Gashwick just to choke you off."

"Stop that! You will drive me mad!"

"Can't help it; that is just the way it looks to me, and I'll bet a penny that's just how it stands."

"Then you would tell me she cares nothing for me?"

"That is about the size of it, count; your chances in that direction are nil."

"But, he shall never have her—Zounds! I swear that he shall never have her! Dog of an American! what right has he to so rare a flower?"

"Ha! ha!" laughed the Scorcher Detective. "I think he has the first claim, my dear count. He is an American himself, while you are the foreigner in the premises. It looks as if you have an eye to her millions."

"No, no; it is the lady herself I love."

"Well, it may be an exception to the rule, in your case. Anyhow, you will not despise the millions, of course."

"Peste! I care nothing for her wealth, I tell you. I swear it!"

"Then, if it is beauty you are after, regardless of dollars, you can find a thousand truly handsome young ladies in this city who could give Miss VonBronx points and win on their looks."

"Ah! you do not understand. It is the heart—the heart—that I desire! Wealth and beauty are as nothing compared with the heart!"

"I understand; if it is heart you want I can supply the demand ad lib. There are ten thousand women on this island, innocent of wealth and unburdened with personal charms, yet whose hearts are veritable mines of gold—"

"Zounds! I will not listen to you. There is only one heart in all the world—"

The Scorcher interrupted, singing softly—

"Only one girl in this world for me, Only one girl has my sympathy; She's not so very handsome—"

"Maledictions!" cried the count, fairly boiling with rage. "You torment me beyond endurance. My blood is burning!"

"Well, it will soon have a chance to cool again," averred Sam. "But, you were to answer some questions—"

"I will answer nothing."

"Very well; then I'll see the reporters—"

"Inferno! What are the questions? I'll be revenged for all this, mark you!"

"Be sparing of your threats, my dear count. How long have you known Miss VonBronx? That is to say, how long have you had the entree to the mansion of your adored?"

"Peste! What is that to you?"

"That is one of the questions I see fit to ask you."

"I will not—"

"Very well; I'll turn the reporters loose on you—"

"Three months, about three months, I would say. How far is it to our destination?"

"Not far, now; just about far enough for me to ask the questions I have in mind. You had not reached the point of proposing, then?"

"No, curse you! No."

"Save your curses, my dear count. Did you hear anything about a peculiar misadventure the younger sister had a little time ago?"

"I would not mention it. The reputation of that family is too dear to me. You are a heartless brute to try to force such private matters from me. But, I know nothing, nothing."

"In the latter, I am inclined to agree with you. What if suspicion were to turn upon you, however?"

"Suspicion? What do you mean, sir?"

"An unsympathetic public might say that the Count Berkmann, eager to get hold of the VonBronx millions by marrying the elder daughter, sought to put the younger daughter out of the way—"

To the surprise of the scorcher his prisoner turned as pale as death.

Was it possible, Sam thought, that he had struck near home?

"What is the matter, count?" he asked.

"A—sudden faintness," he answered. "You—you surely are not serious in what you say."

"I was merely giving you an idea of what an unsympathetic public might say," reminded Sam. "Once let such an idea get out and there are plenty who would take stock in it."

"But it is false, it is atrocious! How could I have placed the lady where she was found? Besides, no harm had been done to her—the family physician declared that. You do me a great wrong by even hinting at such a monstrous suggestion, sir!"

"Well, well, don't take it seriously; I am not going to make any such charge against you. Here we are at the station, and I will introduce you to the captain or sergeant in charge." And taking his man by the elbow, police fashion, he ushered him in and preferred the charge of reckless driving on the Boulevard, on which the count was held.

CHAPTER XIII.

NARROWING THE CIRCLE.

The Scorcher Detective felt that he had been revenged for that cut in the face with the whip.

He might have allowed the man to give

a false name at the station, but he would not do that, since the sting of the punishment was in the fact of his true name being known.

There Sam left him, and as he went away the count cursed him and shook his fist after him, pouring forth something in his own language which he perhaps thought Sam would not understand; but Sam was something of a linguist, a fact that was not generally known.

The count had made threats against his life.

"All right, old chap," said Sam to himself. "Let me know when you begin, that's all, and I'll try to be on hand."

He had an enemy in the count, true enough!

Later in the day, having learned where Anton Gashwick was stopping, Sam called on him. The detective had put off his bicycle costume and appeared as a well-dressed man about town. He sent up an assumed name, of course.

There was a little delay, the cause of which Sam understood. The name was unknown to the Westerner, so he close-questioned the servant respecting the man's appearance.

The servant was directed to show Sam up, and the caller found Gashwick toying with his card.

"I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance, I believe," he said, as Sam entered.

"I have ventured to call on the strength of my acquaintance with Mr. VonBronx and his family, sir," said Sam.

"You surprise me."

"In what?"

"I am barely safe-entered there, myself."

"Well, do not let your surprise overcome you. I have called on business."

"That being the case, pray state it."

"You were out riding with Miss VonBronx this afternoon, when a man rode up beside your carriage and used his whip—"

"Confound it! then you are an infernal reporter?"

"No, I am not a reporter. I am here in the interests of Miss VonBronx."

"What is your interest?"

"To make sure that her name does not get into the papers."

"You need not give yourself uneasiness on my account, if that is all. I have not revealed who my companion was."

"I am very glad of it."

"Why?"

"The interest I feel in the family. I have been to see your enemy, and he will not mention her name."

"He was arrested, then?"

"Oh, yes; one of the bicycle police ran him down and took him in, but he would say nothing. He was known, or his true name would not have come out. He has an interest in keeping still."

"I imagine so."

"What do you take his interest to be?"

"Well, seeing that you are a friend of the family, I think he hopes to marry Miss VonBronx."

"And what do you think of his chances?"

"I am in no position to judge."

"Well, I will give you a word of warning: I consider this count a desperate fellow, and you had better look out for him."

"And he had better look out for me, if he tries any more of his funny business. I will shoot him without a great deal of compunction, and it will be done in self-defense, too."

"But he might not go for you openly next time."

"You speak as if he were a villain?"

"He has made some villainous threats in his own language, bad for all concerned if he carries them out."

"I consider him a lunatic. What did he set upon me for?"

"Don't you know?"

"Well, I have reason to suppose he is jealous of me."

"Without reason?"

"Entirely without reason, I will say. He is welcome to marry the lady if he can win her."

"What had she to say about him?"

"See here, you lead me to think that you are a reporter, after all!"

"No, I am not. Not a word that you tell me will be repeated. If Mr. VonBronx were here he would vouch for me."

"Well, his conduct surprised her, but something else surprised her a good deal more—No reason why that should be mentioned, however, for it is of no moment."

"Nevertheless, you have awakened my curiosity."

"Well, it was in connection with the police chap who appeared on the scene and gave me the chance to get away from him."

"What about him?"

"She was surprised to see him there."

"Why, those wheelmen officers are stationed all along the Boulevard."

"I know, but this one had stopped my horses only a little while before, and he must have been following my carriage closely."

"I see. But, what of that?"

"I don't know. She seemed to be disturbed by it."

Sam, having adopted a disguise, of course was not recognized by the other.

"Afraid that her name would get into print, perhaps. Ladies are usually very sensitive about such matters, you know."

"That may have been it; but I don't see why the fellow was following us up. What right had he to keep pace with my carriage, that way?"

"Why, he had all the rights the law could give him; but why he did it I will not attempt to answer. It may be that his business took him in the same direction just at that time."

"Well, no matter. Your business with me was to protect the lady's name, evidently."

"Just as I told you, Mr. Gashwick."

"Well, it shall not be made known through me. As for this count, I do not fear him."

"You hold no malice toward him?"

"Well, it will be just as well for him to keep out of my reach. Not that I threaten his life, or anything like that, but I would be strongly tempted to pommel him."

"Would not blame you if you did. Now I will say adieu, Mr. Gashwick. If I should meet you at the VonBronx home, it will mean an introduction in the orthodox manner. Until then, I will not presume to have made your acquaintance. Good-afternoon."

"But, hold on one moment, sir."

Sam was about opening the door.

"What is it?" he asked.

"It is just possible that you have interest in Miss VonBronx, and that you hold me in something of the same light as the count."

"No, no; I assure you that is a groundless suspicion, Mr. Gashwick."

"Well, I am glad of that; but I wanted to assure you that you need not consider me in any sense a rival."

"You are frank about it, anyhow."

"I am plain about it."

"Does the lady understand it as clearly?"

"There is no reason why she should not, but if not, she shall. I want no more scenes."

Scorcher Sam took leave, having gained all he had come for. He knew that Anton Gashwick, at least, had had nothing to do with the VonBronx mystery.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MYSTERY IS REPEATED.

The following forenoon Scorcher Sam received a summons from Mr. VonBronx.

It had been arranged so that he could be reached, privately, at any time, if wanted, and he made haste to obey the call.

Adopting a suitable disguise, he went to the mansion, and gave the name that had been agreed upon on a former occasion, so that no mistake or misunderstanding might occur.

He was shown into the library.

There he found the millionaire in a greatly agitated frame of mind.

"What is the trouble, sir?" Sam asked, as soon as greetings had been exchanged.

"You sent for me."

"Yes, I sent for you; but whether it will avail anything or not, I do not know. The mystery of this mansion has been doubled."

"Doubled?"

"Well, repeated."

"Then your daughter has—"

"Has had another similar experience, sir."

"Impossible—but, since you state it for a fact, of course—"

"It is the truth. She was brought to the door at daylight, unconscious, the same as before."

"But, I thought her room was being guarded."

"So it was, but the servants complained of having to sleep in the hall, and as soon as it came to Claudia's ears, she forbade it."

"With a motive, do you think?"

"Impossible to say."

"Who found her?"

"The police."

"And it will become known?"

"No, I think not. You know I had it arranged with all the near-by officers."

"How?"

"They were to bring her right here, and keep it still. The reward I held out was enough to insure their obedience. Besides, the public has no business in it, anyhow."

"Well, you are right in that. I was not going to suggest that you make it known, by any means. But, give me the facts."

"I have done so."

"And the mystery is as deep as before?"

"Yes, or deeper."

"How deeper?"

"Why, you see we had the front doors especially secured. We thought she would not be able to get out in her sleep."

"She has had ample time in which to learn the new fastenings."

"Well, that is true."

"And last night was a very chilly night—"

"Yes, and the child was brought in more dead than alive. The doctor and her sister are with her yet."

The old gentleman looked the distress he felt, and Sam felt sympathy for him. The mystery was now even deeper than ever, since the same thing had been repeated.

Scorcher Sam ran it over in mind quickly.

All the theories he had built up, save one, had been swept away, and for the remaining one he had little support.

Gustav Berkmann, the count in search of a rich wife, had spent the night in a police cell, and there was no shadow of suspicion against Anton Gashwick. As for young VanBiltder, he was not to be considered.

"It is very strange," he said.

"Yes; and if it is not cleared I shall go mad!" cried the father. "To think of it, my favorite child under such a cloud."

"She was dressed for the street, as before?"

"Yes, precisely."

"And was found near the same place?"

"In precisely the same place, sir. What do you make of it?"

"Mr. VonBronx, I will solve this mystery or I will give up the profession!"

"That is saying a good deal."

"I mean it."

"Can you do it?"

"I have no intention of giving up the profession; let that answer the question."

"That is equal to declaring that you will do it. God grant that you may succeed. I will make no mention of it to your chief this time, but trust it all to you."

"Just as you please about that, sir."

"But, what will you do? Something must be done this time."

"Your family must order that a trained nurse be supplied for your daughter."

"Needless, sir. Her sister is devoted to her, and will take all that upon herself. Besides, I could not forbid her, could I?"

"I say it must be a trained nurse, sir. The doctor must order it so, after you have privately directed him so to do. Then, you will intrust to me the procuring of that nurse."

"Ah!"

"You begin to see, eh?"

"You would place an aide of yours under my roof?"

"And in such a capacity that suspicion will be well nigh impossible. It will work."

"And that would mean safety for my child, at any rate."

"Yes; the same thing could not happen again."

"It shall be done."

"Very well, I will do my part, and will have the nurse in readiness. The person is a nurse in fact, so she will fill the double role ably."

"One word of caution."

"What is that?"

"You are not to know that she is other than that what she will seem, a nurse."

"No, no, I shall mind that."

"You say so, but will you? For instance, you might be tempted to ask questions—"

"No, no, I promise you that I will not do that. I am helpless, and I am willing to be guided by you in the matter entirely."

"Then it will work. I will keep you posted, and in this way I hope to bring the matter to a termination. As your daughter gets better, you will urge her keeping the nurse as a companion, or maid."

"She has a maid now."

"You are well able to afford two, then. I will see to it that this one will be welcomed by the young lady."

"She will be a person of character?"

"The best, sir."

"Well, I am in your hands."

"You may be asked who I am. A business friend, you will say."

"Who will ask me?"

"Your elder daughter, if she saw me enter, or knows that you have a visitor."

"My elder daughter again. This is the second time you have brought her into the matter in a strange way, sir."

"She is your housekeeper, is she not?"

"Yes."

"What more natural than that she should ask such a question? Is she not accustomed to doing so?"

"True, true. I did not stop to consider."

At that moment the door opened, and the very person they were talking about entered the room.

She looked keenly at the visitor, who seemed nearly as old as her father, and from him to her father, questioningly—all in a moment, even as Mr. VonBronx said:

"My elder daughter, Mr. Hastings. Amelia, an acquaintance of mine. No mention of what probably brought you here. I shall be alone in a few minutes, and then you may come in again. Your pardon, Hastings, but private matters would be of small interest to you."

An exchange or two, and the young lady withdrew. Detective Sam took leave soon after, and before night a trained nurse had been installed.

CHAPTER XV.

BESSIE BLAKE REPORTS.

Some days passed.

One afternoon Scorcher Sam remained at home, expecting a call.

It was the afternoon the trained nurse had stipulated should be hers for an outing, when she engaged with Mr. VonBronx.

Sam had given word that she should be shown up to his sitting-room immediately on her arrival, and in due time there came a tap at his door, and he rose in response.

It was the person expected.

"Well, Bess, you are prompt," he greeted.

"Never knew me to be otherwise, did you, Sam?" was the smiling response.

"Don't know that I ever did," the rejoinder. "Take a chair, and we'll come at once to business."

Bessie Blake is one of the cleverest female detectives in New York City. She can take almost any role, and play it to perfection.

She helped herself to a chair.

"Now, then, fire away!" she invited, in her brisk manner.

"What have you been able to pick up for me?"

"Well, little or much, just as you look at it. You sent me there without letting me know your suspicions."

"Yes, for I wanted you to make up your own mind, without any influence from me. If my views of matters are wrong, they might lead you into the same wrong channel."

"I'll bet they are not wrong, though."

"That remains to be seen. What do you think of Miss Claudia?"

"Innocent as a lamb."

"We agree on that point, anyhow."

"Yes, and are likely to agree on others, too."

"Well, what do you think of Miss VonBronx—Amelia, then?"

"She is not like Claudia."

"That is to say, she is not as innocent as a lamb."

"Not by any means, my honest opinion. Of course, I can prove nothing, yet."

"You think she has had a hand in this business?"

"I do."

"Why?"

"I cannot explain that to my satisfaction, but I hope to be able to do so soon."

"I hope you will. Has the count been there lately?"

"Gustav Berkmann? Yes; and he has got the marble heart in that direction, Sam."

"Then Amelia has cut him?"

"To the core. She has no further use for his highness."

"And what did he say to that?"

"He went off with a dark look on his already dark face, muttering some kind of talk in his own language."

"Then he has been dismissed the mansion?"

"Has been given the icy shoulder; means the same thing."

"Then it is plain that he had nothing to do with the strange adventures of Miss Claudia."

"Plain as day, I think."

"It looks so. Well, what does Claudia have to say?"

"She is a sweet girl, Sam, and I like her. I am going to bring her out all right, too. But, that don't interest you. Why, she is at loss to account for anything that has happened."

"And young VanBiltder?"

"Ah! that is something I must tell you about. He has seen the old gentleman and handed in his resignation."

"Resignation?"

"Yes; has given up his prospective son-in-lawship."

"On what grounds? But, I suppose because this mystery is hanging over the young lady."

"Exactly."

"Mr. VonBronx mentioned that to me in the first instance. He feared it would come to that."

"But, he is a fool for it, and he ought to know it if he can read a woman's heart at all. Claudia feels as badly about it as he possibly can, and she is innocent."

"But he won't see it in that light."

"No; he is jealous, and believes that she has been meeting a rival of his by stealth."

"The fool! Would that account for her being found insensible on the street? I suppose the fact that she has been found both times fully dressed is the point."

"That is it; he holds that there is a shadow upon her good character."

"While you—"

"I say she is as near an angel as a creature of common flesh and blood can ever hope to attain."

"Does the young lady know of the break-off?"

"Not yet."

"What do you think the effect will be?"

"She loves him true enough, and I am afraid that the shock will set her back."

"It will be just as well for her not to know of it, then, until she regains her full strength, I would say. How is she coming on?"

"Oh, she is improving all right, but she had a close call for pneumonia. You know what a night it was that she was out; one more dose of that kind would finish her off."

"Well, Bess, how came she out there?"

"I don't know."

"Give a guess at it, then."

"I don't want to do that, Sam."

"But you suspect that her sister had a hand in it?"

For the first time the young woman appeared to lose her self-possession.

"You are great at reading one's thoughts, Sam Buckley," she declared.

"I would hate to be on the black list and have you after me."

"So would I, Bess," returned Detective

Sam, laughing. "It seems that I struck your strongest suspicion square in the bull's-eye that time. What kind of a game are you playing with her?"

"The innocent game. I don't let her suspect that I could see through the holes in a fire ladder."

"Well, what is her motive?"

"There you have got me; I don't know."

"And that is the weakest spot in your suspicion."

"I know it. When I said she was not like Amelia, a few moments ago, and you asked me then if I thought Amelia had had a hand in it, I said yes; but I did not see then how deep your meaning was. I believe she did have a hand in it; but I didn't mean then that she herself lured her sister out of doors—"

"But that was what you suspected, according to what you have now admitted. Now, if that is true, and you are right, we must find the motive. Without that, the case isn't worth a fiddler's jig. Can you not get it?"

"I can try."

"Well, is that all?"

"No, not quite; Miss VonBronx has an appointment that may interest you."

"Ha! indeed!" Sam was all alert now. "Let me know what it is, and I won't be a thousand miles from the spot at the appointed time."

"She is to go out on her wheel late in the afternoon, and will take a spin to VanCortlandt Park. At any rate, she has received an invitation to make such a trip, and I suspect that it has come from young VanBiltder, who is to meet her there."

"Meet her there? That is a queer arrangement, is it not?"

"He is up the country, I believe, and expects to make the park about dusk. They will meet on Broadway."

"Nigger in the fence here, my dear Bess! Young ladies of her station do not set forth on such trips as that, unattended. How came you to know anything about it?"

"Why, I chanced to see the invitation, to be plain with you. There is little going on that I do not see, when I am on duty. I suppose you will be on hand, and that possibly you will act as unseen escort to the lady. Methinks I see fun of some sort ahead."

CHAPTER XVI.

THOMSEN GIVES A FRIENDLY TIP.

At last Miss Blake took leave.

When she had gone, Scorcher Sam paced the floor for awhile, in a deep study. There were points in the matter not clear to him, and of course would not be until the mystery was solved.

They were points that would not dovetail with the rest of the theory he had framed, so to say. If Miss VonBronx was at the bottom of her sister's mishaps, where was the motive—what the purpose? He had to confess to himself that he did not see one, and hence was not sure of his ground.

Something new had been shaping itself in his mind. Perhaps it was old VonBronx and his moneybags that some one was trying to reach through his daughters. It might be broader and deeper than the detective had thus far delved.

Turning it over and over in mind, a plan of action assumed shape, and ere long Sam set out from his lodging in disguise.

He sought the VanBiltder residence.

There he asked for Mr. Roger VanBiltder. The young scion was at home. While this was a startling piece of in-

formation, in the face of what had been told him, yet it did not appear to surprise Scorcher Sam greatly.

It was right in line with something that had come to mind, and he had made the call on purpose to learn whether the young man was really in the city, or out of town, as reported.

The footman who took Sam's card returned with it, requesting to know his business.

The name was assumed.

Sam took paper and pencil from his pocket, and wrote a few words hastily.

This he sent to the young scion of dollartocracy, and when the footman came forth the second time he bade the detective follow him.

The Scorcher Detective had pretended to be a reporter, and what he had said on the bit of paper was to the effect that he would publish something without confirmation, unless the young man would see him.

He found Roger VanBiltder in a private room.

"What do you want with me?" he demanded.

"Is it true, sir, that you have broken with Miss Claudia VonBronx? Such is the rumor, and we want to give you the chance to deny it if false."

"Confound your impudence, anyhow! What is it your business, or your paper's, or the public's, either, for matter of that? I don't want to talk on the subject at all."

"Very well, sir; I will simply say Roger VanBiltder has nothing to say on the subject."

"Hang it! Why must you meddle with it?"

"Our readers expect us to give them the news, you see."

"And what do I care for your readers? Here, will it be worth something to you to suppress the whole business?"

"And allow some other paper to distance ours? Oh, no; that is not to be thought of, Mr. VanBiltder. Either you have something to say or you have nothing to say."

"What do you want to know?"

"The truth."

"Well, it is true that I have broken with Miss Claudia VonBronx."

"And the reason?"

"A family matter with which the public has no concern, and of which I will not speak."

"Very well; and now, if my personal opinion may be worth anything to you, Mr. VanBiltder, you are welcome to it, but I suppose it isn't: You are treating an innocent young woman shamefully."

"Sir! What do you mean?"

"You are condemning her unheard. She is innocent, and I am going to make it my business to prove her so—"

"Who are you? By what right do you presume to come here and talk to me like this in my own house? By heavens, I have a notion to order my footmen to throw you out of doors!"

"I will save them the trouble; I will go. I am Sam Buckley, the detective, and I am still at work on that mystery. I tell you this to guard you against possible newspaper reporters who may come to see you, once they get an inkling."

"You want to guard—"

"An innocent young lady's good name, yes. If reporters call, don't know anything at all. You have said enough to me to make a fine story, if I were in that line."

Young VanBiltder could only stare.

"Confound it!" he exclaimed. "You

really think the young lady is blameless, Buckley?"

"I not only think so, but I am going to prove her so, and that perhaps before another twenty-four hours pass by. By the way, have you an engagement with Miss Amelia this evening?"

"No, sir; I have not!"

"Very well. She will be out, and you had better improve the opportunity and go and call on Claudia."

"Confound your impudence! You presume to dictate to me in my own affairs? By heaven! this is a little more than a fellow can stand, don't you know?"

"There; don't take it so to heart, for I don't care a picayune about you; it is the young lady I am thinking about. She loves you, and as soon as knowledge of your treatment comes to her, it will be bad—very bad for her."

"But, think of our good name. We can't afford to have it clouded over with mysteries like that, don't you know?"

"Of the two, her name is the better. Good-day!"

Sam cut it short and took leave, and as he hastened away from the house he did some tall thinking.

What was the scheme Amelia VonBronx was trying to work? Was she at the bottom of it all, or was she only the tool of evil designers? There was a knot to be untied.

Sam hastened home and donned a wheel costume, and, in another disguise, came forth with his "bike."

In a little while he was on the Boulevard.

There he fell in with some of the bicycle corps, with whom he exchanged greetings.

This he did more to prove the efficacy of the pre-arranged signal by which he was to be known to them, than for any other purpose.

The hours of duty of the bicycle police, by the way, are from 10 a. m. to 5 p. m., and from 5 p. m. to midnight, and in the time on they do an average of fifty miles patrol duty each.

Hence, they are to be met anywhere, at any time, during the periods mentioned.

Ere long Sam met Thomsen.

Giving him the signal, he drew up and stopped.

"Hang me if I would have known you, Sam," Thomsen exclaimed. "You are the very man I wanted to see, though."

"You wanted to see me?"

"Yes."

"What about?"

"About that black-and-tan foreigner of yours, as you called him."

"Ha! is that so? What is the word about him? I am still interested in that gentleman, to a degree."

"He passed up this way not half an hour ago, in company with a couple of as villainous-looking cutthroats as you ever saw in your life. They were togged out like swells, though."

"What do you make out of that?"

"I thought maybe they meant to lay you out, if they could find you."

"Well, much obliged to you for the tip, but it is not likely that they will know me. What kind of a rig had they?"

"An open barouche, with a very red-faced driver and a pair of big bay horses. You will not fail to recognize the driver, if you see him. Reddest face you ever saw."

"All right, I will have my eye open for them, Thomsen. Much obliged to you for the tip. I feel it in my bones that there is going to be music in the air tonight, and that I shall be one of the

chaps to beat the tom-tom and make the welkin rattle."

Thomsen laughed, they exchanged a parting salute, and Scorcher Sam rode on his way.

CHAPTER XVII.

SCORCHER SAM SHOWS SAND.

Scorcher Sam sped away in the direction of Washington Heights.

He did not much exceed the speed limit, and anyhow his foot-motion was so leisurely, on his special, that his speed was deceptive.

Reaching that part of the city, he made it a point to pass the VonBronx mansion, but nothing was to be seen of any of the inmates. A signal displayed at a certain window, however, told him that Miss VonBronx had gone out on her wheel.

That signal, needless to say, was from Bessie Blake.

The detective on wheels continued on his way, and was soon on the Kingsbridge Road.

Crossing the Harlem, he struck into Broadway, and so on in the direction of VanCortlandt Park, all the time keeping a sharp lookout for the young woman in whom he was interested.

Broadway skirts the park on the west side, and by the time he reached the park it was growing dusk.

At length he stopped, in a good spot, in a hollow and near a deep piece of woods.

Leaning on his bicycle, he watched those who passed up and down, and ere long he saw Miss VonBronx coming slowly toward him down the roadway.

She scanned him closely as she passed, evidently thinking it possible that he might be the person whom she expected to meet, but, seeing that it was not, went slowly on her way. And she had scarcely gone when an open barouche came along.

The driver was a man of exceeding red face, but there was only one person in the vehicle, and that person was Count Berkmann.

"Well, the plot thickens," assumed Scorcher Sam. "What has become of the other two worthies, I wonder? And what does this fellow mean by following Miss VonBronx? Things are coming to a head here, I fancy."

And, mounting his wheel, Sam followed the barouche, to discover that it had overtaken the young woman on the wheel.

The barouche had passed the young woman, but stopped short, and Sam heard its occupant call out to her.

Not only so, but he leaped out, while she dismounted, and for some moments they talked together. It was not dark enough for Sam to draw sufficiently near to hear what was said, nor light enough for them to discover him easily.

The delay was not long; the count lifted his hat, took leave, and got into the barouche again, which immediately rolled away, and Miss VonBronx stood where he had left her. She was lighting her bicycle lamp, and, having done that, she mounted and turned straight into the park.

"Hello!" exclaimed Sam to himself. "The band begins to play, sure enough! What villainy is she and that black-and-tan foreigner up to, anyhow? She is a girl of nerve, to venture here alone. Well, here goes!"

He turned into the park after her, and kept her in sight.

He was puzzled to understand the case. If she and the count were in "cahoots,"

why had he not come with her? If they were not, what influence had he been able to exercise over her, to lead her to venture into that desolate place alone?

Guided by the ray of light that danced along the parkway just ahead of him, the Scorcher Shadower kept her under surveillance.

As the darkness increased, her light shone the brighter on the roadway.

Suddenly it disappeared!

Then there was a scream, followed by another, that was suppressed before it was fully uttered.

Sam shot ahead as far as he dared in the darkness, and then dismounted, leaned his wheel against a tree, jerked a revolver from an inside pocket of his close coat, and ran forward.

Of a sudden the screaming, for the moment suppressed, was heard again, and it guided the Scorcher to the scene.

Suddenly a light flashed forth, and Sam beheld a rough, bearded man, running, with Amelia VonBronx in his arms!

He was running toward an open barouche, from which the light was being thrown to guide him, and in the barouche was Count Gustav Berkmann!

Outside sat the driver, and on the ground was another man, who, evidently, was a good mate for the one who had the young lady in his arms. All this Scorcher Sam saw, before he was seen himself.

"Drop her, you villain! or I will drop you!" was his salutation.

Curses were heard instantly, and the light was flashed for an instant upon Sam, then it disappeared.

The Scorcher knew he was in a bad situation, with four against one, but he did not hesitate, when the life of a young lady was at stake.

It was but a few steps to the place where he had last seen the bearded scoundrel with the lady.

Three or four strides, and Sam was there.

The man had again clapped his hand over the girl's mouth, but she was able to make sound sufficient for Sam's guidance.

Suddenly he came up against the man. He felt for the bearded face, and dashed the butt of his revolver into it with force.

With a groan, the man dropped like a log, and Sam made a reach for the young lady, and saved her from going to the ground heavily.

Then the light was flashed again, just for a second, and Sam saw the other fellow and the count coming for him, the count armed with a knife.

Sam took advantage of the momentary flash, and his revolver spoke spitefully. His countship took a tumble to the ground, and Sam immediately blew his police whistle.

Instantly the other fellow, whom the shot had not scared off, ran forward and caught Sam in his strong arms.

"Kill him!" cried the count, in his own tongue. "All is lost, if we fail now! Cut him! Kill him! Anything!"

"He is as good as dead," was the response of the powerful fellow, as he twined his arms around Sam and tried to throw him to the ground.

But, Sam was still very much alive.

Dropping his revolver, and releasing his hold of the young woman, he grappled with the hired ruffian.

His training in the field of sports stood him in good stead now.

Sam was silent, wary, and lithe as a leopard—a full match for the brute-force

of the city thug. While they were thus engaged Sam heard the barouche moving away.

At the same time came the distant note of a police whistle, and Sam knew that some sort of a response must be made in order to guide the policemen to the scene of the struggle, so he told the young woman to feel around on the ground and find his revolver and fire it.

Instead of that, however, the young woman voiced scream after scream, that must have been heard a mile away, and ere long light flashed through the trees and a mounted policeman came dashing along, his horse almost colliding with the big bays of the barouche, the driver of which he called to a stop at the point of a revolver.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SOLUTION OF THE MYSTERY.

The driver of the barouche came to a halt, needless to say.

He had a wholesome regard for his good health, evidently, as well as for a whole skin.

"What is going on here?" the mounted policeman demanded, severely. "What is all this screaming about? What are you doing here without lights?"

"Sure, divil a wan av me knows," the fellow answered, and it would be superfluous to mention his nationality. "As to me lamps, it is a runaway Oi have had, and smashed thim all to smithereens!"

"Hold that chap, officer!" cried out Scorcher Sam, just at that juncture.

"I have got him," was the response.

"Who are you?"

"One of the bike cops."

"Are you on top?"

"You bet!"

"All right; be there in a minute."

Sam was on top, true enough. He had just overcome his man, and had a knee on the pit of his stomach.

The mounted officer ordered the driver of the barouche to turn around, which order was obeyed, the fellow taking a lamp from under the seat to light his way, and in another minute there was plenty of light on the scene.

The first fellow Scorcher Sam had tackled lay just where he had dropped, and it was the same with Count Berkmann. Sam was holding the other ruffian, as said, and Miss VonBronx stood by, too terrified to act or speak. There was a momentary tableau.

The mounted policeman was the first to speak.

"You didn't tackle the four of them!" he exclaimed, in amazement.

"Yes, I had to," said Sam. "Just secure this fellow's hands, will you?"

"Well, you are a man of grit!" commented the officer as he dismounted.

The fellow bound, Sam got up and politely bowed to Miss VonBronx. In disguise, as said, she could not recognize him.

"You were wrong to venture in here unescorted, lady," he said. "If you will give me permission, I will accompany you to your destination. I am a police officer, you see."

He showed his badge.

"I shall be only too glad to have your company back to the lighted streets, sir," she said.

"Then you were not going through the park?"

"No. I was going to Mosholu station to meet a friend whom I expected down on a Northern Railroad train, but I see

now that I was deceived. I owe my life to you, perhaps."

"And it was this fellow deceived you?" indicating the count.

"Yes."

The count was groaning.

"Get me to a hospital," he called. "I am done for; get me to a place where my wound can be attended to."

"Yes, we must see to you," asserted Sam.

An examination proved the wound not dangerous, and Sam stopped the flow of blood with little trouble. The man was bundled into the barouche with the other prisoners, and, under the escort of the mounted officer, all were taken to the station.

"Now, Miss VonBronx," said Sam, when the others had gone, "I will see to your wheel, as soon as I light my lamp."

"What! You know my name?"

"Yes."

"Who are you?"

"Sam Buckley, or Scorcher Sam!"

"Good heavens! Is there no escaping from you anywhere?"

"You may thank your stars that I was within call on this occasion, or you would now be a prisoner."

"Yes, I am thankful; but the fact that you were here proves that you followed me. Why are you haunting me? What do you hope to gain by it?"

"I am determined to learn the truth respecting your sister, and now I begin to see light ahead. If you desire to save your good name, and avoid publicity in this matter, you had better confess."

"Confess! To you?"

"To your father. I know the truth already. It has been revealed to me in this hour."

"Impossible!"

"Fact. You expected to meet Roger VanBiltder—"

"Ha! who told you that? No one knew it—but, that villain Berkmann; my curse upon him!"

This was all Scorcher Sam needed. It supplied the missing link in the chain, and he had his case complete! The motive for the mysterious happenings at the VonBronx mansion was no longer wanting!

"I know more than that," Sam went on. "You love young VanBiltder; to win him you sought to remove your sister from your path. You, with the aid of a woman named Bowen, one of the servants in your father's household, gave her a sleeping potion and carried her out of doors, in order that she might take a fatal cold and die."

"Spare me! Spare me!"

She dropped to her knees on the ground, clasping her arms around his legs.

"You showed no mercy to her, the innocent sister who loves you," persisted Sam, severely.

"But, I loved him so! You cannot understand! I was mad with jealousy, I was insane! Only spare me—"

"On one condition I will spare you."

"Name it, name it!"

"That you return with me at once and confess all to your father."

"Oh! I can not, I can not! It will kill me, kill me! Let me go away and be seen no more forever!"

"It will be better than having your name in the papers, with a great sensation for a gaping public to read. Confess to your father, and it will go no further."

"No, no! Let me find a grave in the river—"

"Not to be thought of. Here, your wheel is ready for you; get on and come with me."

"Yes, yes; I will confess—admit all. Do not take me to the police, as you would a common person! Take me home, and father shall know all. My God! how I have been punished!"

Sam escorted her home, they riding side by side on their wheels, and on the way the young woman gave all the particulars of the affair.

Arriving at the mansion, Sam spared her feelings by telling the story for her, and Mr. VonBronx listened to it with pale face and downcast eyes to the end. He then remarked:

"You are a keen-sighted young man, Buckley. You told me from the first, or as good as told me, that my daughter was the guilty one. I saw it, I believed it in my heart; but I had to have the proofs. Amelia, how could you—how could you?"

We draw the curtain.

Amelia VonBronx went abroad, to perfect herself in art—it was said, and, marrying a foreigner, she never returned.

Claudia and young VanBiltder were married, and Roger confessed himself heartily ashamed of the unworthy suspicions he had allowed to enter his mind.

The amount Mr. VonBronx had offered for the solution of the mystery was promptly paid, and Scorcher Sam gave Bessie Blake a good slice of it for the valuable aid she had lent him in the matter. She is still his "right bower," as he names her.

We probably shall hear of her again.

Count Gustav Berkmann recovered from his wound, and, as soon as freed, set sail for his native country, with no one to mourn his going. The driver of the barouche on that eventful night was punished as he deserved for his part in the matter, and the two others were sent up for a term of years each on that and other charges, for Sam soon had their records "down fine."

The Scorcher Detective received the praise of his superiors and the congratulations of his friends. The men of the bicycle corps are proud of him as one of their flying brigade, and, with his unique wheel, they are willing to bet on him every time, in a brush for speed or a race for a rogue.

The necessity for the bicycle squad daily increases, and the detectives of the corps have more cases and adventures than we could possibly chronicle; yet it will be our pleasurable duty to keep record of such as fall to the lot of Scorcher Sam, the Detective on Wheels.

THE END.

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OR,

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